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THE MORNING RIDE.

THE MASTER OF THE HOUNDS.

BY

"SCRUTATOR,"

AUTHOR OF

"THE SQUIRE OF BEECHWOOD."

IN THREE VOLUMES.
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THE

MASTER OF THE HOUNDS.

CHAPTER I.

Mrs. Gordon, having her own carriage and horses in London, to prevent interference with her sister's arrangements, the two next days were chiefly devoted to calls on her particular friends, shopping, sight-seeing, &c., in which she was accompanied by Blanche and Constance, Lady Malcolm seldom going out until three or four o'clock in the afternoon. But her ladyship, after having conceded thus much to her sister, feeling pardonably proud of her niece, and ignorant of her attachment to Beauchamp, now

became anxious to exhibit her in public, as well as among her own aristocratic set—hoping and believing that Blanche would, from her personal charms and large fortune, soon have an opportunity of forming some splendid alliance.

The next night, therefore, found her sitting with Lady Malcolm in the front row of her opera box, towards which many inquisitive glances were directed from those on the opposite side of the house, many of whom were personally known to Lady Malcolm.

"Who can that be," inquired the Duchess of B—— of Lord Henry Bayntun, who had just entered her box, "sitting with Lady Malcolm? She appears very young, and very pretty, although evidently new to London life, from her bashful and timid looks."

"That is Miss Douglas, your grace, Lady Malcolm's niece, who makes her first appearance to-night in the fashionable world."

"Oh, I remember now the name—the young lady whom Lord Vancourt attempted to run away with."

"The same," replied Lord Henry, "and, by all accounts, Vancourt made a very near thing of it."

"Pray, lend me your glass a moment," exclaimed Lady Mary, the Duchess's eldest daughter (who had now entered on her fifth London season), "I really must have a thorough scrutiny of Danby's idol; for no one, in his opinion, can be compared to Miss Douglas—and there, I declare, is that foolish boy just entering their box."

"Well, Lady Mary, what is your opinion?" asked Lord Henry, "as I should think you must by this time have scanned her features sufficiently to know her again."

"Pretty, rather, though country-looking, with a superabundance of pink."

"Occasioned, perhaps," suggested Lord Henry, "by Danby's appearance; but look again,—there is not too much vermilion now, or my vision is defective. She has fine eyes and handsome features, certainly."

"Oh—so, so," replied Lady Mary, rather contemptuously, returning the glass to her mother; "but Danby takes extraordinary fancies into his head about women."

Being offered a seat, Lord Danby remained some time in Lady Malcolm's box, conversing

with the ladies, and occasionally addressing observations on the opera to Blanche, which were rather more courteously received than at their first meeting in the park. In fact, Blanche, reproaching herself, on reflection, for her very distant behaviour to him on that occasion, now relaxed into a more friendly mood, seeing her repulsion of him then had been noticed by her aunt, whose looks were the reverse of commendatory.

Ineffectual efforts were made by other loungers, who occasionally looked in, to obtain an introduction to the heiress; but Lord Danby tenaciously holding his position, as a bar to all others approaching her, in whom he still took so deep an interest, remained oblivious of the lapse of time until the last act of the opera, when, apologising for his long intrusion, he reluctantly left the box.

When the curtain fell, Lady Malcolm expressed her intention to remain during the ballet also, and Blanche, remembering Beauchamp's remarks, rose from her seat, and making an excuse that the glare of the lights affected her eyes, Constance changed places with her

and she felt relieved on finding herself near Mrs. Gordon, who, equally displeased with the prospect of the coming exhibition, had vainly endeavoured to persuade her sister to leave the house before the ballet commenced.

"You are quite right, my love," whispered her aunt, "in withdrawing from that exposed position, although my sister and Charles laugh at our prudish ideas, as they call them, about the *danseuses*. For the future, I shall order my own carriage to be in waiting after the opera is over; but I did not wish, on our first appearance, to give offence to my sister."

As Taglioni flitted across the stage, throwing herself into her most graceful though not very modest attitude, Malcolm, delighting to tease his cousin, said — "There, Blanche, is not that quite perfection?" — And now as with a twirl, she stood for a second on her toes; "Wouldn't you give a good deal to be able to astonish Will Beauchamp with such a feat as that?" or "Look now, that pirouette—my stars! how Beauchamp would stare, to see his darling perform such an evolution!"

"I'm surprised at you, Charles," said Mrs. Gordon, "tormenting your cousin in this foolish manner."

"Oh, nonsense, aunty, dear; Blanche will soon become accustomed to such sights, and then think nothing of them, as others do."

"Indeed I shall not, Charles," replied Blanche, firmly, "and I hope never to witness another ballet."

Sir John Martingale now entering the box, Malcolm was diverted from further attacks on poor Blanche, who, leaning back against the side of the box, shewed her fixed determination to withdraw her eyes from the stage, in which she was seconded by Mrs. Gordon, who began conversing with her on other subjects. Great was the relief to both when this indelicate performance ceased, and they were once more safe in the carriage, through all the draughts, hustlings, and bustlings consequent on the last falling of the curtain.

Although custom reconciles us to many strange sights, that is not the question to be considered, but the *first* effect produced on the mind of the beholder. What are our first impressions?

These will be found generally to be our best guides in most cases. What, then, are the natural feelings of every modest girl on witnessing, for the first time, the ballet at the Opera House? Those of offended delicacy and disgust. The attitudes assumed by the dancers, and their indecent dress, are not only often inelegant, but perfectly revolting. For instance, what can be more absurd than the very favourite position of standing on one leg, with the other thrown out nearly at right angles with the body?—(not to mention its horrible immodesty), why, a swan or a goose performs this grand feat without any effort at all. By the general patronisers of the ballet, the same answer may be returned as by the girl skinning live eels—they are used to it. That is true enough of the ladies who can witness apparently unmoved, such exhibitions night after night, although false as regards the eels. In fact, the *habituées* of the Opera House, after having undergone the operation of being flayed of the first outer soft cuticle of delicacy, lose or suppress all further feeling in the matter; at least they pretend to great indifference or cal-

lousness, which, in the majority of cases, I fear, is not assumed, but really experienced. But the same cannot be said of the male portion of the spectators, who have no modesty at all, and on whose account principally this detestable exhibition is still fostered in a professedly Christian community; for my impression is decidedly that these immodest displays fan the flame of passion in men, and tend to keep alive those unhallowed desires which sensualists only will and do so freely indulge. To such, the ballet at the Opera House is the grand attraction; and so long as it is countenanced by those ladies in the higher sphere of life, who give the tone to fashion, so long will it continue a reflection on their own characters and a disgrace to a civilized nation. Can it be matter for surprise, that right-thinking Christian ministers inveigh so bitterly against theatrical exhibitions and balls, when their tendency is so palpably to debase and demoralise the minds of young persons of both sexes? Were plays divested of coarse jokes and *double entendres*, they would be restored to their primitive province, as a medium of instruction and amusement, instead of

as now, the means of corruption to youth; and of balls it may be said, there is nothing objectionable in our country dances or quadrilles; but the foreign introduction of waltzes and polkas, now so universally adopted, tends to great laxity of manners, and of morals also. Human nature is ever prone to evil, and needs no excitement to vice; the difficulty is to check these inclinations. But in the cases alluded to, as if natural passions were not strong enough and hard enough to subdue, additional incitements are added. Modesty is like the fresh bloom on a plum, which, when once rubbed off, never returns.

Blanche and Constance, when they had retired to their rooms at night, although delighted with the orchestra and the singing of Grisi and Lablache, could not repress their feelings of repugnance to the ballet, and Constance resolved to entreat Malcolm to spare them both the repetition of such a scene. The next night there was a ball at the Countess of Arnmore's, in the same square, for which Lady Malcolm, in anticipation of her niece's arrival in town, had accepted cards of invitation some time previously. Lady

Arnmore being still young and handsome, although arrived at that time of life when ladies will not confess to their age, was one of the leaders of haut ton, and her parties therefore quite *recherchés*, which will account for her rooms being most inconveniently crowded on this occasion, so that the dancers had scarcely space sufficient to glide through the figures of a quadrille.

The first person to accost Blanche on her entering the room was Lord Danby, who engaged her for the first dance, and begged Lady Malcolm to allow him to introduce his mother, the Duchess of B——, to herself and Miss Douglas, which was of course gladly acceded to. Blanche's natural timidity was considerably increased on finding herself among a set of perfect strangers, and it must be confessed she would gladly have preferred being a looker-on, instead of being looked at; but having no excuse to refuse Lord Danby, she was obliged, though most reluctantly, to take her place in the dance, and to be stared at and pulled to pieces by the other young ladies who entertained certain views of conquest over her highly-favoured partner.

"Who is that timid-looking creature dancing with Danby?" asked Lady Fanny Trimmer of her partner, Lord Henry Bayntun.

"Miss Douglas, Lady Malcolm's niece, and an heiress with ten thousand a year."

"Oh, indeed! then Danby is turned fortune-hunter, I suppose?"

"I think not," was the reply. "His opinion on that point is pretty generally known, although he was sitting with her the whole of the opera in Lady Malcolm's box the other night."

"Well, I am surprised at his want of taste — what can he see to admire in a bashful, country-looking girl, without the semblance of fashion about her."

"Danby is an odd fish," replied Lord Henry, "and takes odd fancies into his head, but I suspect is in earnest about this Scotch lassie, from having introduced her and her aunt to the Duchess, the moment they entered the room this evening. Now you see, Fanny, between ourselves, this young lady's money would just suit a poor devil of a younger son like myself, and some people do say she was not an unwilling party to Lord Vancourt's attempted

abduction, only that her cousin, Malcolm, for the credit of the family, took it up with a high hand. A few hints to your friend, Lady Mary, on this point, won't lose their effect when repeated to the Duchess, and may serve us both."

"Thank you for the suggestion, Henry, which shall be acted upon without delay."

The other great attraction of the evening to the unmarried ladies was Lady Arnmore's brother, the rich and fastidious Marquis of Ayrshire, now in his thirty-fifth year, on whom the smiles of the fair sex had been hitherto completely thrown away. He was, although not handsome, most distinguished in appearance, and highly polished in manners, with a literary turn of mind. Being master of several languages, and having travelled over half the globe, he was well informed on most subjects, and in conversation most agreeable. Possessing, in addition to these recommendations, a princely fortune, he had been for the last two seasons a grand speculation in the higher circles. Although a great admirer of beauty, his requirements in other respects were so multifarious, that it seemed almost impossible they could be realized in any

one woman ; still he was ever on the look out for the person pictured in his mind's eye as the future Marchioness of Ayrshire, and it was his invariable custom to go the round of balls and parties of every description, in the hope of finding at last the being his fancy had pourtrayed. The form and features of every new *debutante* in the fashionable world were eagerly scanned, and if sufficiently attractive, an introduction was immediately obtained through some one of his numerous acquaintances. On this night, when, with glass to eye, he was taking a survey of the dancers, his attention was arrested by the modest looks, handsome features, and graceful movements of Blanche Douglas ; and Lord Malcolm happening at that moment to be passing him, he asked, "Can you tell me, Malcolm, who that pretty, interesting young girl is, dancing with Danby ? she is evidently new to London life."

"Yes," replied Malcolm, "she is my cousin, and this her first appearance on the London boards."

"Well, I thought so, Malcolm, and all the better, in my opinion, on that account. Will you introduce me ?"

"With pleasure, if we can work our way round to where she stands."

This being effected after some trouble, Malcolm presented Lord Ayrshire to Blanche, and he at once begged the honour of her hand for the next dance. This being granted, he remained standing near her until the quadrille was finished, when his arm was offered and accepted. Great was the dismay of Blanche when a waltz tune struck her ear, and her partner was proceeding to take up his position in the circle now quickly forming.

"I beg your pardon," she said, "but, instead of the next dance, I ought to have said the next quadrille, as I do not waltz."

"Surely you will not decline one or two turns to this enchanting air, Miss Douglas."

"Yes, my Lord," Blanche replied, firmly, "indeed I must, and shall be obliged if you will conduct me to my aunt, Lady Malcolm, or, as I see my cousin opposite, I can take his arm."

"Indeed, Miss Douglas, I will with great pleasure conduct you to Lady Malcolm, whom I have the houour of knowing."

On finding her aunt, she expressed her sur-

prise at Blanche not joining in the dance, exclaiming, "Why, my dear, your country notions on this and some other points are rather too particular, and you really must give up these old-fashioned fancies."

"I hope not, dear aunt," was the quiet reply, as she sat down by her side.

"I am sorry to differ with your Ladyship upon such an important point," added Lord Ayrshire, good humouredly; "but I must applaud Miss Douglas's resolution to act as her own feelings dictate."

"What, teaching rebellion to my niece, Lord Ayrshire?" replied Lady Malcolm, laughing.

"Not that exactly, I hope; but as I assume to myself the right of acting according to my own opinions, I am liberal enough to concede the same privilege to others; and as Miss Douglas disapproves of the waltz, I must respect her judgment, although pronounced against myself."

"Then, albeit a decided waltzer yourself," rejoined Lady Malcolm, "you will not stand up in its defence."

"Not absolutely, and I am not quite sure

that I should select a waltzing young lady for my wife."

"Very consistent indeed, my Lord, inducing young girls to act contrary to what you consider right, and then condemning them for yielding to your own persuasions."

"Or rather, you should say, Lady Malcolm, yielding to their own inclinations, for they are quite free to say yes or no."

Lord Ayrshire remained talking with Lady Malcolm and Blanche until the waltzers had ceased their gyrations, when he led her forth to take their places in the quadrille then forming; and from his having expressed opinions so congenial to her own, Blanche feeling more at ease in his company, her restraint and timidity gradually gave way to greater cheerfulness and vivacity. Her partner, with the tact of a man of the world, succeeded without much difficulty in obtaining a tolerable insight into her character and disposition by the answers returned to his various questions, and he was as much charmed with her *naïveté* of mind, as he had at first sight been with her beauty and elegance of person. Lord Ayrshire's attentions to Miss

Douglas did not fail to be noticed by Lord Henry Bayntun, and many others, which drew forth the remarks—

"Ah! there is Ayrshire, as usual, attaching himself to the new *débutante*, but no woman will ever come up to his requirements. Nothing short of an angel can possibly suit him—this will be a three nights' devotion, perhaps, and then the old story—too short or too tall—too good looking or not good looking enough—too clever or too stupid—too forward or too shy—in fact, that fellow never will be satisfied, and must remain a bachelor until he gets into his dotage, when he may finish his career of single blessedness by marrying his housekeeper."

"Nothing more likely," replied Sir John Martingale; "but I advise you to give Malcolm a hint not to allow Ayrshire to make a fool of his cousin."

"I think his attentions, knowing how they must end, will rather favour than retard my plans," said Lord Henry, "so let him have his head; mine must be now a waiting race, as there are two favourites before me."

From the overcrowded state of the rooms,

the heat now became so oppressive to Blanche, that Lord Ayrshire, noticing her distress, remarked, "You are not yet, I see, accustomed to this tropical climate, Miss Douglas, which almost exceeds the temperature of India; and as a lady's fan is but a poor substitute for a puncha, I will conduct you to my sister's little bijou of a conservatory, where you will find relief from this melting atmosphere, although few are ever admitted into her sanctum, for fear of her choice collection of plants and flowers being injured or plucked. Blanche was glad to escape almost anywhere from such crowded rooms, being quite overcome, and ready to faint from the excessive heat, and Lord Ayrshire, having led her by a private door into this comparatively Elysian retreat, placed his sister's easy chair before her, saying he would return directly with some refreshments; and he soon reappeared, followed by a servant bearing ices and cooling beverages, which being placed on a small table, the man withdrew.

Blanche having expressed her thanks to Lord Ayrshire for his polite attentions, and feeling now renovated by a glass of wine and water, rose to leave the conservatory.

"There is no necessity for your hurrying away so quickly, unless you prefer dancing in that hot room to this cool retreat."

"I do not intend dancing again to-night," replied Blanche, "having suffered already so much from the heat, to which I am not yet inured. But Lady Malcolm will wonder what has become of me."

"Oh, do not trouble yourself on her account. Chaperons do not expect to see much of their charges, when dancing has once commenced; but should your absence be noticed, Lady Malcolm, I am quite sure, will feel obliged, instead of displeased, at my having saved you from fainting."

Thus pressed, Blanche consented to remain a few minutes longer, Lord Ayrshire directing her attention to the choice and rare collection of plants with which they were surrounded; and thus occupied, and with his agreeable conversation, the time passed away rapidly; and half an hour had nearly elapsed, when Blanche, hearing the carriages arriving, expressed her desire to join her aunt without further delay, which was of course complied with.

Lady Malcolm's carriage had just been an-

nounced, when Blanche returned to her aunt, who at first appeared much displeased, Malcolm having searched for her in vain through the rooms; but she was pacified by Lord Ayrshire's explanations, and accepted his arm down stairs.

Malcolm rallied Blanche, when they reached home, on the easy conquest she had achieved over the hitherto obdurate heart of Lord Ayrshire.

"Why, my dear, you are as irresistible as Cæsar, who, with his *veni, vidi, vici*, came and conquered the world by the sound of his name. You are a second Circe, and have changed this man of stone into a fawning devotee by the wand of your enchantment. All the Lady Marys and Lady Fannys in the room were mad enough to scratch your eyes out, my love, and the men declared they had never seen Ayrshire so thoroughly spell-bound before."

"Charles, how can you talk such absurd nonsense!"

"Facts, my dear—facts, I assure you, 'pon rep, as Markham says."

"I must caution Blanche, notwithstanding," interposed Lady Malcolm, "from trusting too

much to the Marquis's attentions, who, although very agreeable, and a most desirable *parti*, has become quite notorious for his flirting propensities with every young girl on her first appearance. In short, he is a mere butterfly, flitting round every fresh opening flower, without intending anything further."

"Thank you, dear aunt, for your friendly warning," replied Blanche, "although I am not aware of having given Lord Ayrshire the slightest encouragement."

"What will be said, and what was said, of a Miss Douglas withdrawing from the company and sitting for half an hour with Lord Ayrshire alone in his sister's boudoir? D'ye call *that* nothing, by way of encouraging a man's addresses?" asked Malcolm, jestingly. "Why, I overheard Lady Fanny Trimmer exclaiming loud enough to be heard by half the room, 'Only think of that demure, bashful-looking girl playing the flirt already with Ayrshire, shut up together half the night in Lady Arnmore's sanctum!' People will talk, Blanche, and this story will be circulated through her ladyship's extensive circle of acquaintances before this time to-morrow night, and lose nothing by carrying."

"Indeed, Charles, I could not have been there more than twenty minutes, if so long, but feeling ready to faint from the excessive heat, I accepted Lord Ayrshire's offer of taking me for air to what he called his sister's conservatory, and I am surprised and mortified to hear such a trifle magnified into a serious offence. For the future, however, I will take care no one shall again accuse me of being a flirt."

"That's right, my love,—spoken like a Douglas," replied Malcolm, "so now, good night;" but on opening the door he whispered, "What will Beauchamp think of this story, which he certainly will hear as soon as he arrives?"

"I will tell him myself," she replied, "the moment I see him."

"The best thing you can do, dear girl, so now think no more about it."

CHAPTER II.

Blanche, however, did think a great deal more about it, and it worried her so incessantly, that sleep was courted in vain that night or rather morning, and feeling restless, she rose early and went down into the breakfast-room for a cup of tea. Beauchamp had arrived in London the previous night, and having breakfasted early, walked to Grosvenor Square, to give his friends a surprise.

"Any one up yet in the house?" he enquired, on gaining admittance.

"Only Miss Douglas, I believe, sir, in the breakfast-room. What name shall I say, sir?"

"Beauchamp;" with which he was ushered into Blanche's presence, who, springing from her chair, rushed to meet him, exclaiming, "Oh, William! what a joyful surprise," holding out her hand; but the moment the door was closed, she was pressed to his heart in a long and fervent embrace.

"You look flushed and excited, my dearest girl, this morning," Beauchamp remarked, after he had been sitting with her a few minutes. "What is the cause of it?"

"A sleepless night and bad head-ache, from an overcrowded party at Lady Arnmore's."

"And nothing more?" enquired Beauchamp, noticing her heightened colour and averted looks.

"Yes, dear William, there is something more; I have been excessively annoyed and mortified by a trifling occurrence which took place there;" and she then frankly related what had happened, with Malcolm's remarks, and her own deep regret for having one moment left the ball-room; although," she added, "I feel convinced, dear William, I could not have been absent longer than twenty minutes."

"My own dear Blanche, do not worry your-

self another moment on this account. There is nothing very particular, that I can see, in your wishing to escape for a few minutes from such a furnace into a cooler atmosphere; and had you not done so, a scene might have ensued from your fainting."

"Dear, dear William, I am so glad you are not displeased and take my part—for all others I do not care, let them say what they please."

At this moment aunt Gordon made her appearance, and Beauchamp, rising to meet her, was met by a warm salute on his cheek.

"My dear boy! I am so overjoyed to see you that I cannot refrain from giving you a kiss. You are not jealous, Blanche, I hope. Now sit down, William, whilst I make the tea, and tell me all the country news—first of your father, and then our other old friends."

As Beauchamp was proceeding in his relation, Malcolm entered the room, exclaiming, "Oh, my prophetic soul! Will Beauchamp, I declare—Well, old fellow," shaking him warmly by the hand, "I was dreaming of you and the governor last night; we had just pulled down our fox in the open, after a burster of forty minutes,

when in getting off my horse to save the brush, I found myself getting out of bed! So here you are at last, just in time, my boy, as Blanche is, as usual, getting into all kinds of scrapes, and another run-away match already on the tapis."

"I have heard all about it, Malcolm, and don't think she is much to be blamed in this ter."

"Ah! a cannie chield—there is nothing like having the first word, and telling one's own story, Beauchamp; but now—how is the governor?"

"Hale and well, with serious intention of coming up to town next week."

"Hurrah!" shouted Malcolm; "he'll be the lion of the season, with his leathers and tops, for no one can persuade him to leave them off, I suppose."

"Not until dinner-time, certainly," replied Beauchamp. "Well, old fellow, where are you holding out?"

"At Long's Hotel, and my horses will be up to-morrow night."

"All right, old boy—now we shall have some fun—and here comes Con," who threw herself into her brother's arms in an ecstasy of delight.

"There, Beauchamp, let that do for the present, so much kissing makes my mouth water; but your sister shall have one for tempting me;" which was accordingly inflicted without much resistance. A good hour having been spent at the breakfast table, Beauchamp asked what was the order of the day.

"None issued yet," replied Malcolm, "as my Lady Mither seldom honours us before twelve."

"Then I propose, aunt," said Beauchamp, "if you do not object, taking these girls a stroll in Kensington Gardens; they both look in want of a little fresh air."

"Go, by all means, William, and I will order the carriage directly."

"I think a walk there will be of greater benefit this fine morning, aunt."

"Oh, yes!" rejoined Blanche, "do let us walk."

"Very well, my dear; then I will call for you in the carriage, at the entrance on the Bayswater road, about one o'clock."

The young ladies were not long in making their preparations, and, escorted by their beaux, left the square in high spirits.

"Well, dear Blanche," asked Beauchamp, "how do you think you will like a London life?"

"Not at all, William, if I must judge by first impressions, and those, you say, are generally right."

"Yes, dear girl, they are so, in my opinion, of many things, particularly as to London life, which requires considerable schooling for one like yourself to appreciate or understand; moreover, you must be thoroughly acclimatised before you can enjoy it, if enjoy it you ever can, which I sincerely hope you never will. For instance, last night you could not enjoy a dance, because not inured to the excessive heat of these London rooms, which has little or no effect upon those accustomed to it. But this training to endure an unhealthy atmosphere will cost you the loss of that youthful bloom now mantling in your cheek, which no art can ever replace; and your participation in that constant succession of frivolous amusement, which so many make the business of their lives, will be at the expense of your own peace of mind. When once involved in the giddy vortex of London dissipation, you will

irresistibly be borne away in its attractive whirl, engaged in a perpetual round of balls, dinner-parties, operas, &c., with neither time nor inclination then, perhaps, for reflection. Oh! what a state of existence, dear Blanche, for rational and immortal beings, in fruitless, senseless pursuit of a phantom, which is ever eluding their grasp, expending recklessly the freshness and strength of their youthful minds and bodies on pleasures (if they can be called such), which will entail upon them hereafter bitterness and reproach."

"Oh, my dear William, do not believe your own Blanche can ever forget so far her duty to God or to you, as to become a reckless votary of fashion; indeed, I have in this short time seen enough of London life to know and feel it will never suit me, and I shall be only too happy to return to the Priory."

"There ought to be moderation in all our recreations and amusements, dear girl, and there can be no great harm in your seeing a little of the gay world, now you are here."

"Without you, dear William, I have no enjoyment any where—but your presence gives me

confidence; and already I feel quite a different being to what I have been since my arrival here."

"Well, lecture number one having lasted quite long enough, we will join Constance and Malcolm."

"Now, Beauchamp," exclaimed the latter; "we will sit down on this bench, and you must tell us all about Mrs. *Summertop* and Miss Honoria—has the young lady proposed yet? as Blanche is exceedingly anxious to know."

"They propose a visit to London, Malcolm, which I have tried ineffectually to ward off; for Mrs. Winter, having heard that Blanche and Constance are to be presented at the first drawing-room, has taken it into her head that her daughter must be presented also; and, I am grieved to add, she has engaged a house already in Albemarle Street, to be near her friends (as she calls us) in Grosvenor Square."

"The deuce she has!" cried Malcolm. "What fun!—but not a word of this to her ladyship, Beauchamp—just fancy my lady mother's astonishment on hearing Mrs. and Miss Winterbottom announced."

"It is very provoking," remarked Constance,

and all the blame will be laid on me, for inviting Miss Honoria to Bampton."

"Never mind, my dear," replied Malcolm; "it will be as good as a comedy. I only hope I may be at home when she calls. My gracious! what a scene it will be!"

"Really," said Blanche, "I must tell aunt Gordon to prevent her calling, or Lady Malcolm will be seriously offended with us all."

"You shall do no such thing, Miss Marplot," returned Malcolm; "or I'll pay you off, Blanche, and peach about something else—don't you or Constance give a hint even to aunty."

"Very well, I suppose we must submit—but now I think the carriage will be waiting for us."

After handing the ladies in, Malcolm walked home with Beauchamp across the park, who was most kindly received by his mother, with a general invitation to her house. Soon after luncheon, visitors began calling, and the Marquis of Ayrshire was announced, who, from the occurrences of the previous night, entertained the idea of having made a favourable impression on Blanche, and appeared rather disconcerted by her distant behaviour to him. His lordship's

polite inquiries were met with brief, though courteous, replies; and, as her attention was so much occupied with Beauchamp, who was sitting near her, he very soon made his *congé*, muttering as he went down stairs:—

"Ah! some fox-hunting cousin, I suppose, fresh from the country, with all the parish news!"

The gay young widow, Mrs. Egerton Fortescue, was next announced, and received by Lady Malcolm in the most friendly manner, and introduced by her to Blanche, Constance, and Beauchamp. She had married very early in life (being taken almost from the school-room to the altar), at her mother's instigation, Mr. Fortescue, a gentleman of large fortune in the north of England, although old enough to be her grandfather; but having made him a most dutiful and attentive wife, during the five years they lived together, he had bequeathed to her his whole fortune, on his decease, unfettered and uncontrolled. Mrs. Fortescue, although not strikingly handsome, was decidedly pretty and extremely fascinating; and there was a sweetness in her smile, and gracefulness in her manner, with a total absence of all affectation, which rendered her particularly

interesting and attractive. She had now, although a widow, only attained her twenty-second year; and, through her late husband's connections, had obtained a good introduction amongst the aristocracy.

Constance took a great fancy to the young widow; but Blanche, recollecting Lady Malcolm's observations on a former occasion, felt far from happy in her company, regarding her admiring glances towards Beauchamp as prognostic of more serious intentions; and she was becoming nervous and restless, when Mrs. Fortescue, having chatted most agreeably for nearly an hour on the various topics of the day, rose to take her leave.

"Well, Mr. William," asked Lady Malcolm, "what do you think of the young widow?"

"Lady-like, rather pretty, and very pleasing, with the art, peculiar to some ladies, of saying a great deal in a very pleasant way about nothing —in other words, a very amusing, chatty little person."

Blanche breathed more freely.

"And is this all you have to say of this most charming, fascinating creature, to obtain from

whom one approving smile, such as she bestowed on you, half the young men in London would feel extremely flattered? Indeed, Mr. William, I am quite surprised at your want of taste," continued Lady Malcolm; "but you will think *her more* than pretty, when you hear she has about eight thousand a-year at her own disposal, which, with a little attention, might become yours; for, knowing her sentiments on marriage, you are precisely the person to suit her."

"Really, Lady Malcolm, I shall become disagreeably vain, if you pay me such compliments; but I think there is little prospect of my becoming a convert to your opinions respecting this charming young widow—every man has his peculiar fancy, and ten or twenty thousand a-year would not render her a whit more pretty in my eyes than she is at present."

"You will think differently when you become better acquainted," replied Lady Malcolm. "And now, my dears," addressing Blanche and Constance, "we will take our drive in the park."

"And we will join you there on horseback, my dear mother," said Malcolm, "to keep off

the bees and butterflies. So come along, Beauchamp," as running down stairs he sung:—

"'For she is a charming woman,
And he's a most fortunate man.'"

"Egad, you're in for it, old fellow, and booked for the widow, *nolens volens*."

The afternoon being fine, there was a grand display of gorgeous equipages in Hyde Park; and it must be admitted that in no city of the world can there be seen such beautiful women and splendid horses as in the metropolis of England during the fashionable season. As Malcolm and Beauchamp rode leisurely along, they recognised many acquaintances from the country—Lady Markham, the Comptons, Rollestons, and others; and, on rounding the corner into Rotten Row, came nearly into collision with the Captain, who exclaimed:—

"Eh, Beauchamp, 'pon honour—nearly unhorsed me, old fellow—blind with dust—such a crush—ah! Malcolm—how do?—just passed the ladies—couldn't get near—Ayrshire, Danby, and lots of swells in close attendance—met

the Harcourts—everybody in town—Barnet, Gwynne, Melville, and even Bob Conyers."

Leaving the Captain, Malcolm and Beauchamp essayed in vain to reach the side of the carriage which contained their treasures.

"Hopeless attempting it now," remarked Malcolm. "That fellow, Ayrshire, sticks like a leech to every pretty new face which takes his fancy. The harder the conquest, the more he perseveres. Blanche's coolness this morning has put him on his mettle."

"If that is his game, Malcolm, the probability is, that he will put me on *my* mettle—and very soon, too."

"No, no, Beauchamp—let us have no more scenes—you must take things quietly, as I do. Moreover, women don't like their lovers to be tied to their apron-strings morning, noon, and night, to the exclusion of all other men; and, you know, a good-tempered horse won't bear to be ridden on the curb continually—it frets and galls the most tractable. So bear in mind that if you are perpetually lecturing and hectoring Blanche, she will, much as she loves you now, be disgusted—and remember the trite old verse:—

'Be to her virtues ever kind;
And to her faults a little blind;
And put the padlock on your mind.'

Even your hounds would not fly to and love you as they do, were they to be met with rating and the whip, instead of endearment and caresses."

"Yet the young hounds I am obliged to rate and correct sometimes, Malcolm, when they are doing wrong, and they do not love me the less for it. But now, I tell you frankly, after having given Blanche every caution I thought necessary on her entering this new sphere of life, she is quite free to follow her own course without further lectures or interference from me."

"I am glad to hear such a determination on your part, Beauchamp—teach her to fly to you as a refuge and comforter from annoyances or troubles of any kind; and you are secure of her confidence and affection."

"That is my intention, Malcolm, henceforth; I have only treated her as I would a dear young friend, when being first thrown on the world, by giving her my best advice; firmly believing she has sufficient good sense to appreciate my true motives. Beyond this, you know

she will never be fettered by me, and I repeat, what I have before told you, that if, on mixing more in society, she can find any man she prefers to myself, no word of reproach or remonstrance shall ever escape my lips. Lady Malcolm and yourself, under whose protection she now is, must decide whether the person she may select is in all respects, not in rank and fortune only, but in character and disposition also, calculated to make her happy."

"Come, come, Beauchamp, don't be riding the high horse again, you are always too soon up in your stirrups; but you ought to know, if you do not already, my true feeling in regard to yourself; so now, my dear fellow, let us say no more on this subject, which is always a ticklish one with you."

"To be accused of *hectoring* your cousin, Malcolm, is not very palatable; as such an intention has never entered into my head."

"Then I recall the offensive expression, Beauchamp; but what I meant was this,—that as Blanche *has already*, from remarks I heard at Lady Arnmore's ball, created rather a sensation in the *beau monde* (at which I am not

the least surprised, from her extreme loveliness), a little enhanced, no doubt, by the other considerations of fortune and position, you must not be too captious about her receiving that homage which is her due. All women at heart are, I believe, fond of admiration, and, depend upon it, Ayrshire will only stand as one of a rather long list of admirers after her presentation at court. There is one other point I must allude to,—my mother is exceedingly fond of the opera, and as Blanche is living under her protection, I should recommend your not volunteering an exposition of your peculiar ideas with regard to the ballet, which at present happens to be the fashion."

"My opinions with regard to the ballet, or any other objectionable place of amusement, when called forth, shall never be suppressed, Malcolm, even in the presence of royalty. But as to my attempting to interfere with Lady Malcolm's recreations, or obtrude my convictions upon her ladyship, that would be the height of presumption."

"Come, Beauchamp, a truce to further parley on this unpleasant topic; I see the carriage approaching, and it is our turn now to take the places of Ayrshire and Bayntum."

"Excuse me, Malcolm, from attempting to obtrude myself into the place of one who appears to have Lady Malcolm's sanction for so pertinaciously adhering to her carriage; and as I have letters to write, I will leave your horse at the stables;" with which Beauchamp turned short round and left him.

CHAPTER III.

THE dinner hour had nearly arrived, and Mrs. Gordon, Malcolm, Blanche, and Constance were dressed, and sitting in the drawing room, when the former exclaimed, "What has become of William, Charles? he dines here to-day, I conclude, and is always very punctual."

"Perhaps my mother omitted to give him a special invitation for this evening," replied Malcolm.

"Nonsense, Charles, he would not stand upon such ceremony."

"Then, I fear, you will not see him to-night at all, aunt, as I happened, when speaking to him, in

our ride to-day, about his so continually lecturing Blanche, which I don't approve of, now she is under my mother's roof and launched on the gay world of fashion, to let fall the word *hectoring*, at which he immediately took fire."

"It was a harsh term, Charles, and not, in my opinion, at all applicable to William Beauchamp's friendly advice to Blanche, which is the reverse of dictatorial; but has he ever ventured to accuse you of *hectoring* it, as you say, over Constance?"

"No, aunt, certainly not; nor has he ever in any way interfered with me, although I think Constance will acquit me of pestering her with unnecessary advice, or imposing restrictions upon her time or actions."

"Still, Charles," said Constance, "you have your own peculiar fancies about some things, as well as my brother."

"Oh, no doubt, my dear girl, we have all our little failings of temper and prejudice," replied Malcolm; "and I confess to being ruffled occasionally, as well as others."

"Then I think," added Mrs. Gordon, "you should make some allowance for your friend,

who, I am convinced, always speaks and acts from the most pure and honorable motives."

Lady Malcolm entered the room at this moment, and expressed her surprise at not seeing Beauchamp, it being now five minutes past the dinner time.

"Shall we wait another quarter of an hour?" she asked of her son.

"I do not believe Beauchamp intends dining here to-night," was the reply, "as neither your ladyship nor myself asked him for this particular day."

"I was not aware that William Beauchamp had become a person of such formality and consequence."

"Neither has he," added Mrs. Gordon.

"Then what can be the cause of his absence?" enquired Lady Malcolm.

"*Me me adsum qui fui*," cried Malcolm; "I am the offender—we had a little altercation in the park about young ladies witnessing the ballet, which Beauchamp does not approve; and venturing to hint that, as my lady mother was rather partial to that exhibition, his opinions on that point had better be suppressed in your lady-

ship's presence, he said the expression of his sentiments, when called forth, should never be smothered even in the presence of royalty itself. Something more was said by me about his old-fashioned ideas, when he turned short round, saying he had letters to write; since which I have not seen him."

"I applaud William Beauchamp," said Mrs. Gordon, "for his manly, uncompromising defence of what he believes right; and much as I love him for his kind, affectionate disposition, I respect him still more for his firm and virtuous principles."

"To which I give assent, aunt Gordon; so now, my dear mother, let us have dinner; and I will take a polite note of invitation to his hotel for to-morrow."

Immediately after breakfast, the next morning, Mrs. Gordon ordered her carriage, and called upon Beauchamp, whom she found busily engaged in writing a long letter, which, on entering his room, he was hastily putting aside with evident looks of confusion. Rising and welcoming Mrs. Gordon in the most affectionate manner, Beauchamp expressed the honour he felt conferred

upon him by the visit, and was entering on other subjects, when Mrs. Gordon interrupted him.

"To whom are you addressing the letter you were in such haste to conceal, William?"

"What a question, dear aunt! Must I tell you the names of all my numerous correspondents?"

"No, William; but I am particularly curious about that individual letter."

Beauchamp hesitated, and endeavoured to evade giving a reply; but Mrs. Gordon, keeping to her point, and feeling annoyed at his refusal to answer her enquiry, at last rose, saying, "It is time for me to go, having lost your confidence, William."

"No, dear aunt, that you never have; here is the letter," placing it in her hand.

"Thank you, William; I see it is intended for myself, which I from the first suspected;" and having read the contents, she said—"So you purposed punishing poor me and Blanche by leaving us so abruptly, merely on account of your difference with Malcolm yesterday?"

"I will tell you all that passed between us,

dear aunt, and then you will judge whether I could feel quite at home with Lady Malcolm or himself, unless I submit to be considered a nonentity."

After hearing his recital, Mr. Gordon said, "Charles has expressed his deep regret at having offended you by his unguarded expression; and as I and Blanche have been looking forward to your arrival in town with so much delight, you will not, I hope, allow this trifling affair to deprive us of the pleasure of your company. In short, my dear boy, our chief enjoyment will be at an end, if you leave us."

"There needs no other inducement for me to remain, dear aunt, if I can contribute in any way to your happiness; but I shall not avail myself of Lady Malcolm's general invitation to her house."

"As you please, William; but I wish you to call on my sister this morning, as she is not a little vexed with Charles because you did not dine with her yesterday; so put away your writing materials, and come with me."

Lady Malcolm received Beauchamp rather formally at first, saying she had expected him at dinner the evening before.

"I was not honoured with an invitation to your ladyship's table yesterday, that I am aware of," replied Beauchamp, very quietly.

"I gave you a general invitation, Mr. Beauchamp, and I meant that to include breakfast, luncheon, and dinner every day in the week, when not engaged myself from home, as long as you remain in town."

"I feel deeply indebted for your Ladyship's most friendly offer of hospitality, although I cannot think of obtruding myself so unceremoniously, when my place at your table might be required for some more distinguished guest."

"Very well, Mr. William, then you will place me under the necessity of writing a formal note every morning to request the honour of Mr. Beauchamp's company at dinner. So you do not approve of young ladies remaining to see the ballet, it seems, by what Charles has told me?"

"Certainly not, Lady Malcolm," was the quiet though firm response.

"Will you state your reasons for holding this opinion?"

"With pleasure, to Lady Malcolm when alone, and I believe I may trust to her impartial judg-

ment to decide whether they are intrinsically right or wrong, without regard to fashion or the world's verdict. 'Those who think seriously will not follow a multitude to do evil.'"

"Well, Mr. William, I believe I never have thought as seriously on this subject, or perhaps on many others, as I ought; but I respect your scruples and honour your principles; and you have my promise that your sister and Blanche shall never again be condemned by me to witness another ballet;—will that satisfy you?"

"Yes, indeed, dear Lady Malcolm," rising and taking her hand, "I do indeed thank you for this kind concession."

"Then now, you foolish boy, will you make my house your home?"

"As far as I consistently can, with the greatest pleasure."

"You will dine with us to-day then, to begin?" to which a most willing assent was given. Malcolm now burst into the room, exclaiming, "Why, Beauchamp, they told me at Long's you were about to leave town immediately; how is this, old fellow?" offering his hand; "surely you are not so mortally offended with me as to leave

us again in this abrupt manner? On my word, Beauchamp, I did not intend to wound your feelings by anything I said yesterday in the Park."

"No man, who acts from upright, conscientious principles, likes to hear his motives questioned, or his opinions ridiculed. It has ever been my rule to speak and act according to the impulse of my own mind, without wishing to dictate to others; but as you appeared to imply yesterday that any expression of my very peculiar ideas would prove distasteful to Lady Malcolm and yourself, you could not be surprised at my choosing the lesser evil of returning home, instead of hazarding an unpleasant collision with those I esteem so highly."

"By Jove! Beauchamp, the pride of all the Malcolms and Douglases who have ever existed is nothing when compared with yours."

"Call it not pride, but proper spirit, Malcolm, to resist the influence of that thraldom which fashion and folly would impose. I don't come to London to borrow the airs or brains of fops and dandies, whose chief occupation is in dangling after carriages in Rotten Row."

"No, by Jove! old fellow, thats clear enough, for you looked inclined to commence a general horse-whipping yesterday, particularly upon Ayrshire, for lounging with his hand on the window-sill of my lady's carriage."

"There, Malcolm, he was quite safe from any interference of mine; but if he is, as you tell me, notorious for trying to make fools of all unsuspecting young girls, I shall give him to understand, on the first fitting occasion, that my sister is not to be included in their number, and perhaps you may give him the same hint as regards your cousin. A man of his character, singling out any young girl as the object of his very particular attentions, merely to make her pander to his vain appetite for conquest, without any serious intentions, is in my opinion deserving censure, if nothing stronger."

"You are quite right, Beauchamp, and I shall certainly give Ayrshire a quiet hint on this subject, which will be quite sufficient; so now come with me to Tattersall's for an hour, and after lunch we will be at the command of the ladies."

On turning into the yard, they encountered

Lord Ayrshire, with whom Malcolm shook hands, and taking him aside said, "You will excuse the privilege of an old acquaintance, Ayrshire; but of the two young ladies you were so closely besieging in my mother's carriage yesterday, one is, as I believe you are aware, my cousin, and the other the sister of my friend Beauchamp, standing opposite, who is rather particular about such things, as well as myself."

"Oh! I understand, Malcolm, you think, I suppose, I am playing the old game; but, on my word, my dear fellow, I am positively in raptures with your cousin, and never felt so serious in my life."

"Then take my advice, Ayrshire, and go no further, for your attentions will be thrown away."

"How so, Malcolm?"

"Simply, because I believe her affections are engaged elsewhere."

"Is Danby, then, the happy man?"

"Not that I am aware of."

"Who is, then, Malcolm?"

"I can afford you no further information, Ayrshire; so good morning. A word to a wise man is enough."

"But not enough for me," muttered the Marquis, as he walked thoughtfully out of the yard. "It is evident Malcolm does not favour my pretensions to his cousin—thinks I am not in earnest, perhaps—but I shall not withdraw, although from his peppery disposition much caution must be observed for the future."

When the gentlemen had left Grosvenor Square, Lady Malcolm remarked, "Lord Ayrshire's propensity to such decided flirtation is very unfortunate, as he is a most agreeable, well-informed person, and in other respects quite unexceptionable; but his sister being a particular favourite of mine, I had invited both to dine with me to-morrow, to meet a few other friends, before Charles and Beauchamp had expressed themselves so warmly on his conduct, which I fear may lead to some unpleasantness."

"Not on William's part, I will engage," replied Mrs. Gordon, from whom your guests will always receive every consideration, and you can of course give Charles a hint, if you think one necessary, which I do not, both so thoroughly appreciating the rights of hospitality."

After luncheon, Mrs. Gordon took Blanche

and Constance with her to a flower show at Chiswick, Malcolm and Beauchamp following on horseback; and they had scarcely left the Square, when Mrs. Harcourt called on Lady Malcolm, and opened her budget of grievances about Blanche, commenting severely on her refusal of Lord Danby and Mrs. Gordon's defence of her conduct. Lady Malcolm upheld her sister, saying she was quite right in allowing Blanche to exercise her own discretion, as any attempt to coerce her feelings would be attended with the usual result. "But I may tell you, Mrs. Harcourt, for your satisfaction, that Lord Danby is still particularly attentive to her, and the Marquis of Ayrshire most unpleasantly so, considering his well-known character for flirtation; but as both dine here to-morrow, you can form your own judgment."

It was then decided that Blanche should be presented at the next drawing-room, the ensuing week. Soon after which, Mrs. Harcourt, on other visitors being announced, took her leave.

CHAPTER IV.

The select dinner-party at Lady Malcolm's, the following day, consisted of Lord and Lady Arnmore, Marquises of Ayrshire and Danby, Sir Lionel Markham and Lady, with two daughters, Mr. and Mrs. Harcourt, and Mrs. Fortescue, with the Captain and Mr. Conyers. Beauchamp was not at first in a very entertaining mood, the occurrences of the previous day and Lord Danby's apparent determination still to persevere in his suit causing him considerable annoyance; but this very reserve was alone sufficient to induce Mrs. Fortescue, whom he handed in to dinner, to continue her attempts at drawing him

into more general conversation; and Beauchamp, finding her ideas on many subjects coincided with his own, became more communicative, and somewhat of his usually cheerful manner returned.

Blanche, who sat nearly opposite, having maintained hitherto a rather grave demeanour towards Lord Danby, feeling piqued at what she thought her lover's unnecessary gaiety of speech to Mrs. Fortescue, sought her revenge by a similar display of light good humour towards his Lordship; which Beauchamp taking as the gauntlet thrown down in defiance, redoubled his efforts to please, in which he succeeded so far as to make a very favourable impression on the young widow, who thought him the most sensible, cheerful, unaffected person she had ever met with. The exhibition of this false play between Blanche and Beauchamp produced, however, a certain effect upon Lady Malcolm, Mrs. Harcourt, and others, who took an interest in observing them, which, although not intended by the lovers themselves, yet in their present position proved most favourable to them.

After dinner, Lady Malcolm held a *grand*

reunion, which means the condensing or compressing together two or three hundred persons into a space sufficient to accommodate comfortably one third only of that number—the effects of which soon became perceptible on the brows of the country party.

"Confound it, Beauchamp!" exclaimed Conyers, "the black hole at Calcutta must have been a cool place in comparison to this; I am literally melting away—distilling from every pore of my skin, and can hold out no longer, so come along."

"Stay here awhile then, Conyers, near the door, whilst I say a word to Blanche before leaving. Have you seen her lately?"

"Yes, in the further room, surrounded by a host of admirers. By Jove! Beauchamp, her head will be turned with so much adulation! I thought how it would be when she came to London."

"Wait a moment, Conyers, I will soon return," replied Beauchamp, and he began to work his way through the crowd, until he discovered the object of his search sitting at the extreme end of the room, with Lord Ayrshire

and Danby standing before her, vying in their efforts to obtain the greatest share of her smiles. Beauchamp stood for a short time behind them, unable to approach nearer; but Danby turning on observing her change of colour and eyes directed beyond him, he gained a nearer position and was able to address her.

"I think you will find it cooler and more agreeable in one of the other rooms."

"If Miss Douglas will be guided by my opinion," added Lord Ayrshire, "she will not run the risk of losing her seat for the chance of a more refreshing atmosphere, which is very doubtful; and I really think this the coolest place in the whole suite of apartments."

"If Miss Douglas will trust to my escort," said Beauchamp, advancing and offering his arm, "she will find my representation correct."

Blanche rose directly, and taking his arm, left Lord Ayrshire, who could scarcely suppress his mortification at Beauchamp's coolness in leading her off. On elbowing his way through the opposing masses, Beauchamp took Blanche to a small back drawing-room, where they found Constance and Malcolm.

"Have I deceived you?" enquired he, "or would you prefer the heated atmosphere you have left, which perhaps the flattering speeches of Lord Ayrshire may have compensated for."

"Oh no, William, I am too delighted to escape both, and wondered why you have kept so much aloof from me to-night."

"I thought you had been too agreeably entertained at dinner, and since by others, to need my presence."

"I may make the same reply, William, as to your flirtation with Mrs. Fortescue, which others have noticed besides myself."

"You set the example, Blanche, and I suppose flirting is infectious."

"Indeed I am not conscious of having done so, although I did feel a little piqued by your gaiety."

"Then, my dear girl, pray donot let us vex each other again by such absurd fancies; and now, as Conyers is here—(who had followed them, and was talking to Malcolm)—I propose we all have a quiet ride together to-morrow, somewhere in the country, as I detest the heat and dust of the park. What say you, Malcolm?"

"Just the thing, Beauchamp, to cool our heated frames after this baking;" to which Conyers assented, and two o'clock being fixed, Malcolm said, "Now, Constance, with your bad head-ache, pray go to your room, or you will not be fit for anything to-morrow, and I will tell my mother that I insisted on your doing so."

"I fear she will be offended, Charles."

"Pooh, nonsense, my dear girl; run away, and take Blanche with you, unless she prefers listening to Ayrshire's sweet voice a little longer."

"Not another second, Charles."

"Then be off, both of you,"—with which the two girls, after an affectionate "good night" from their lovers, made their escape; Conyers and Beauchamp taking their departure at the same time to their hotel.

Lord Ayrshire remarked to Danby, as Beauchamp walked off with Blanche, "That Mr. Beauchamp is a monstrous cool hand, Danby."

"Yes, and a very determined one as well; and you had better be cautious how you contradict or stand in his way; for I know him well, and he will bear no trifling from any

man. When put on his mettle, it is a word and a blow with him—and the blow generally comes first."

"Indeed! but what is Miss Douglas to him?"

"That I cannot tell you, except that they have been brought up together almost as brother and sister."

"Oh, I remember now! He is the fellow who knocked Vancourt about so deucedly."

"Yes, the same—and he is quite ready to administer the same sort of dose to any other man who may treat her with the slightest disrespect."

"Egad, Danby, what with him and Malcolm, one must keep at a respectful distance, I conclude, from the young lady."

"Certainly, unless you wish to be thrashed first and shot afterwards."

Lord Danby, having now, as he hoped, lowered Lord Ayrshire's top-gallant sails, left him to digest his remarks, which he knew would not prove very palatable to his haughty rival."

At two o'clock the next day, when Blanche and Constance, with Selina Markham, were waiting for their horses, a thundering knocking

at the door was heard, on which Selina, who had lunched with them, sprang to the window, exclaiming—

"By all that's funny, Mrs. Summertop, I declare!"

"Mrs. Who?" inquired Lady Malcolm—but before an answer could be returned, Mrs. and Miss Winterbottom were announced, to the consternation of all the ladies and the delight of Malcolm, who whispered Constance:—

"My gracious! Con, here she comes, sailing along like a full-blown peony. Oh, poor mamma!"

Constance rose at once to meet her, for the purpose of screening Lady Malcolm, who took the opportunity to escape by another door, leaving her sister to receive these unwelcome visitors.

"Well, my dear," gasped Mrs. Winterbottom, puffing from the exertion of mounting the stairs —"here we are at last, all in a bustle, like a bag of fleas—and how d'ye do, Mrs. Gordon and Miss Douglas?" shaking each by the hand, "and, my lord, 'ope your lordship's quite well."

"Charming, ma'am, thank you," replied Malcolm.

"And her ladyship—your mamma?"

"Rather ailing, this morning, from an attack of hypochondriasis."

"Oh, indeed! sorry to hear it, my lord—but never heard of the complaint before."

"It is chiefly confined, I believe," replied Malcolm, "to persons in fashionable life."

"But lauks, my dear," turning to Constance, "you and Miss Douglas look uncommon peaky—hope you won't catch the same disease."

"Nothing more likely," added Malcolm; "I suspect they are sickening with it already—or the scarlet fever."

"My gracious! my lord—I 'ope not—Honoria has never had that dreadful disease—or the small-pox either;—but I heard both the young ladies were going to court next week."

"If not prevented by illness, such is their intention, I believe," replied Lord Malcolm.

"Well, my lord, I was just a thinking, if her ladyship would be so very obliging as to take me and Honoria under her wing at the same time, I should consider it a very great favour."

"I really cannots ay what arrangements Lady Malcolm has made; nor am I aware if she

has positively decided on being present at the next drawing room."

"Well, my dear," turning to Constance, "I dare say you will let Honoria know her ladyship's intentions; and as we have taken a house for the season in Albermarle Street, not far off, you know, just a nice little walk from Grosvenor Square, I hope you and Miss Douglas will look in upon us just in a friendly way, and Mrs. Gordon too. Happy to see you at all times; so don't make any bones about fashionable hours. Papa is so fond of the theatre in Covent Garden that we always dine a quarter before six, to be ready for the play; so pray come when agreeable. Going for a ride, I suppose, Miss Douglas, in the Park; won't detain you any longer this fine day:" with which Mrs. Winterbottom bustled off.

"Hah! hah! hah!" cried Selina, "'pon honour, here's a treat in store for her Ladyship, —Mrs. and Miss Winterbottom, by Lady Malcolm!—my gracious! what a sensation such an announcement will produce!"

"Confound her impudence!" exclaimed Malcolm; "but it is an impossibility."

"Of course it is," replied Constance; "at least, I should never dream of even hinting such a thing."

"This comes, my dear Con," said Selina, "of your patronising such vulgar people and asking the young lady to spend a few days at Bampton?"

"It was done by my father's desire, Selina, and you know the reason why we endeavour to be on good terms with all our neighbours, even at some little individual sacrifice; but this is a most unexpected proposition, which I shall positively decline to make to Lady Malcolm."

"Well, come along," cried Malcolm, "Beauchamp and Conyers have just arrived; and aunt Gordon can tell my mother as much as she likes about Mrs. Winterbottom;" on which they descended into the hall, and the ladies were placed on their steeds by their attendant cavaliers.

Of all recreations, there is not one more exhilarating than a ride in the country on a fine May morning, when the weather is in that delightful temperature experienced generally in that genial month. May is the season of youth to all vegetable nature, then just bursting forth

with all the freshness and fragrance of its early bloom. Even the leaves of the trees possess a softness of touch, and a lively, glossy verdure, which is not to be found in any other month.

As Beauchamp rode by the side of Blanche, he plucked a beech leaf from a bough overhanging the road, and, placing it in her hand, said, "There, Blanche, is an emblem of yourself; can anything be more soft and delicate than the down of that pretty leaf, now just expanded in its youthful loveliness? Yet two months hence, after the dust and heat of the summer's sun, all this freshness and glossiness will be gone;—so will, I fear, dear girl, the bloom now mantling in those glowing cheeks be destroyed by the over-heated, unhealthy atmosphere of these fashionable assemblies, which is more destructive to youthful complexions than the burning rays of the Midsummer sun to the foliage of the trees."

"Oh, William! how I wish the London season was at an end, at least as regards myself. This puts me so in mind of our happy rides in the country—shall we ever feel so happy again?"

"Yes, dear Blanche, there is no reason why

we should not feel happier still; but all the happiness I can look forward to, depends solely on yourself; and I fear the influence all this gaiety and dissipation may have on your young heart and mind. If those remain unchanged, by God's permission, I trust far happier days await us, than any we have yet enjoyed together; although nothing could or can exceed the transport of that moment when first I found my love returned by her I prized more than life. But a more calm and steady feeling has now succeeded to that inexplicable, almost overwhelming sensation of ecstatic delight, which is experienced only on the first discovery of our affection being returned; but what it has lost in its novelty is now fully compensated for by its enduring and increasing strength. A truce now, however, to moralising; we must put our horses into a canter, to overtake Malcolm, who is nearly out of sight."

After a pleasant gallop through Richmond Park, the party returned home; the ladies much improved in appearance by their exercise, which had restored the roses to their cheeks, and dispelled the languor of the preceding night.

The next morning Constance returned Mrs. Winterbottom's visit, explaining to her that, Lady Malcolm being no relative of her own, she could not take the liberty of preferring her request about the presentation of herself and daughter at the drawing-room. "In fact," said Constance, "I am only a visitor in Grosvenor Square, and therefore could not presume to make such an overture to her ladyship, although I should be most happy to oblige you in anything which depended on myself."

"But you might get Lord Malcolm or Miss Douglas to speak for you, my dear," replied Mrs. Winterbottom; "or what's the use of friends and relations, if they won't do kind acts one for another?"

"Lord Malcolm makes a point of never interfering with his mother's arrangements in any way," continued Constance, "as she is very particular in some respects, even with her own son; and Miss Douglas is equally averse to asking such a favour of her aunt, to whom she is at present under so many obligations, as well as myself."

"Oh, very well, Miss Beauchamp, it don't

signify, making such a fuss about a trifle; but we aint grand enough for you quality folk,—that's the secret."

"You have no reason to say that," replied Constance, rather indignantly, "of me or any of my family, as we have all shewn you every attention in our power."

"Well, my dear, I did not mean to make any reflections against your worthy father, yourself, or young Squire Beauchamp. So don't be angry with me; and as you can't speak to Lady Malcolm, I must make papa look out for somebody else to present us at Court. Most things to be had in London for a consideration."

"No doubt," replied Constance, as she rose to take her leave.

CHAPTER V.

We must now pass over a month. Blanche and Constance had been presented; both being much admired—but the former from her superiority of height, brilliant, sparkling eyes, combined with her faultless form and graceful demeanour, attracted very general attention, to which the fact of her being an heiress, and Lady Malcolm's niece, gave additional charms. And after her inauguration at Almack's, she was unhesitatingly pronounced by the cognoscenti in female beauty, such as Lord Ayrshire, Danby, and others, the Belle of the Season.

Beauchamp witnessed with secret alarm the

increasing number of Blanche's admirers and the adulation paid her, which he was powerless to avert, although his influence was still unsparingly exerted on every fitting occasion, to counteract the effects of the poison so continually poured into her ears. To his quick observant eye (and what perception is more acute than a lover's?) her repugnance to flattery began to yield, first to its endurance, and then to a more qualified reception of its pestilential breathings. Vanity is, without, doubt one of the chief compounds of human nature, by which all, even the very best of mankind, are influenced, although almost imperceptibly to themselves; and it would be absurd to say that Blanche Douglas did not feel pleased, perhaps rather elated, by the homage paid to her charms, although too pure in mind and innocent in heart, to throw out the least lure by words or actions to attract it. There is an excitement in dissipation which drags its youthful votaries first reluctantly, perhaps, then almost irresistibly along its slippery path, until they become so thoroughly entangled in its mazes, as to be incapable of extricating themselves.

The London season was now in the zenith of its splendour, and invitations continued pouring in to Lady Malcolm in such rapid succession, that even her ladyship, though long inured and case-hardened to dissipation, began to feel wearied with its constant repetition. New additions had been made to her already extended list of acquaintances at the instigation of Blanche's admirers, many of whom, moving in the highest circles, had induced their mammas to send cards of invitation to Lady Malcolm and Miss Douglas. Amongst others, the Duchess of Castleton invited them to a grand ball, in which Malcolm and Constance were included; but Beauchamp, although long known to Lord Danby, and meeting him constantly at parties, was passed over. On the evening of this ball, he was dining in Grosvenor Square, when Malcolm observed, "We shall meet you, of course, to-night, Beauchamp, at Castleton House?"

"I have not received an invitation," was the short reply.

"How is this, Beauchamp? I took it for granted Danby had asked you long ago. Surely, then, he must have considered you included in our party."

"I think not, Malcolm; Lord Danby has particular reasons, no doubt—(casting a meaning look at Blanche)—for declining the honour of my presence at his mother's ball."

"Stuff and nonsense, Beauchamp—it must be an oversight, so come with us, as I am quite sure Danby will be glad to see you."

"You must excuse me, Malcolm; it is not my custom to obtrude myself any where, without being unmistakingly invited."

"Riding the high horse again, my good fellow?"

"Not in the least, Malcolm, unless proper self-respect is to be so called. The slight was intended—as such it is accepted, and from this hour I shall decline the honour of his lordship's acquaintance."

"Really, my dear fellow, this is carrying things too far."

"Not further than I deem it incumbent on me to do, and I hope I shall never be deficient in proper spirit to meet the first approach to arrogance or insolence from any man, however high in rank, with the most thorough contempt. But my intended course with reference to Lord

Danby need not influence you or others, as I do not wish any one to take up cudgels in my defence."

"I understand, however, what is implied," replied Malcolm, "that your sister ought not to attend the duchess's ball to-night."

"Constance knows what is due to her brother, as well as to herself," was the answer.

"Then, I suppose, she is not to accept any invitations, unless you are included also," retorted Lord Malcolm.

"Such an idea is almost too absurd to need refutation," added Beauchamp; "she has frequently done so, and will do so again, without any remark from me; but having known Lord Danby quite as long, if not longer, than your lordship has, and coupling his late very distant behaviour (scarcely recognizing me, except by a stiff formal bow) with the present exclusion from his mother's party, to which you all (more recent acquaintances) are invited, I must be wilfully blind not to perceive the intended slight."

"In my opinion," observed Conyers, "Will is acting perfectly right, and if I saw any man

inclined to cut me, I would save the necessity of our acquaintance dying such a lingering death, by cutting him dead at once. Some of these grandees condescend to be very sociable, and shake hands with us country fellows on our own ground, where we may help in their amusement of hunting, or serve them for electioneering purposes; but when they meet us in town, the fog, I suppose, prevents them distinguishing such insignificant Liliputians, except through a magnifying glass, and then a very distant bow is the only sign of recognition."

"But I heard Lord Danby invite you to this ball myself," said Malcolm.

"Very true, my lord, and the same honour was conferred on Melville, Markham, and others, in my hearing. Beauchamp's exclusion, therefore, is more pointed; and as I am one of those old-fashioned fellows who act upon the *love me, love my dog* principle, and consider a slight to my best friend as an insult to myself, the conclusion to which I have come is very obvious; the Duchess will not be incommoded by my presence to-night, and Lord Danby will be spared the trouble of raising his hat to me for the future."

"By Jove! Conyers," exclaimed Malcolm, "you are as ticklish as Beauchamp."

"If by ticklish, my Lord, you mean sensitive to unprovoked insult, or contemptuous conduct towards myself or my friends, you have judged rightly of my character. Not for one moment will I submit to either; and as Beauchamp cannot go to Castleton House to-night, I certainly shall not."

"Then, what do you purpose doing?"

"Oh, whilst you and the ladies are scanning the beauties masculine and feminine in high life, I will take Beauchamp to the green-room, behind the scenes, in Covent Garden, and have a look at the beauties in low life, and finish up with a lobster supper."

This conversation having commenced after the dessert was placed on the table, Lady Malcolm now rose, leaving the gentlemen to finish their discussion, when Lord Malcolm, failing to alter the two friends' determination, and beginning to lose his temper, proposed joining the ladies. Lady Malcolm had already retired to dress; but Constance, taking Malcolm aside, began speaking to him in a low, earnest tone,

stating her determination, after what had occurred, of not going to the ball.

"Pooh! nonsense, my dear," exclaimed Malcolm; "you must not adopt your brother's foolish crotchets—surely my wishes ought to be consulted now, as well as his, although I certainly shall ask Danby some explanation why he was not invited."

"On my account," said Beauchamp, who overheard these words; "I must beg, Lord Malcolm, you will not even hint at an explanation, as I neither require, nor will I accept any. Lord Danby and I understand each other quite well enough already; and now, my dear Constance, you must do violence to your own proper feelings, in taking your brother's part, by complying with my desire to accompany Lady Malcolm to the ball."

"Indeed, William, I had much rather not go," pleaded Constance; "and Lady Malcolm has been kind enough to excuse me."

"My dear girl," replied Beauchamp, "for Lady Malcolm's sake, who has, no doubt, accepted the invitation on your account and Blanche's, I must desire you will go; so not

another word on the subject;" saying which, he turned away and resumed his seat, and was immediately joined by Blanche.

"You cannot be offended with me, I hope, dear William, because I could not venture to ask Lady Malcolm to excuse my attending her to-night, as Constance did. She, as your sister, had a fair pretext to decline going."

"But you, of course, had *none*," added Beauchamp, "not even to express one word in my favour, and left my friend Conyers to fight my battle alone."

"Now you are unjust, William; for although fearing to be thought forward in giving utterance to my sentiments, I have felt the slight offered you more deeply than Constance, and shall resent it as firmly as yourself after this night, when I cannot possibly be rude to Lord Danby in his mother's house."

"Of course not," replied Beauchamp; "and no doubt his arguments, like Lord Malcolm's, will weigh heaviest in the balance against mine, as your cousin, I see, is resolved to maintain his position by obtaining some excuse from Danby for not inviting me, which I am equally

resolved not to accept. Extorted apologies of this sort make the matter ten times worse, and knowing this slight was purposely intended, Lord Danby and myself must remain for the future strangers to each other."

"I shall not be influenced, William, by anything he or Charles may say, and shall leave you to judge, by my future conduct towards him, whether I do not feel as deeply in your cause as Constance or Mr. Conyers."

"There, now, my dear girl, run away to dress, or you will be very late, and keep Lady Malcolm waiting. Come, give me your hand—good night."

"But where are *you* going?" she inquired, still holding his hand.

"With Conyers, to be sure; we must have our share of amusement as well as yourself."

"Oh, pray, dear William, do not go with him to those horrid places he spoke of. Promise me not to go there."

"If you will promise not to dance two quadrilles with any one partner to-night, I will give up going to the theatre, and sit with aunt Gordon instead."

"The promise is yours, although you know there was no occasion to ask it; and I thank you, my own dear William, for resigning your amusement to please me. I shall not forget your kindness;" saying which, she tripped out of the room.

Malcolm and Constance had both left, and Conyers being engaged in conversation with Mrs. Gordon, Blanche and Beauchamp had an uninterrupted *téte-à-téte.*

"Well, Beauchamp," exclaimed Conyers, "what does Blanche think of our intended visit to the green-room to-night? A little fillip of that sort was not out of place, as she appeared to take it so coolly, going to Castleton House, without uttering a syllable, pro or con."

"Poor child! what could she have said?" asked Mrs. Gordon, "in her present situation? But I can tell you, William, that she does feel very acutely, and so do I, Lord Danby's behaviour to you, and you may rest assured she will resent it also."

"I am glad to hear it," replied Conyers, "for I hate half measures with friends or lovers, and Malcolm has fallen fifty per cent. in my

estimation, by trying to throw dust in Will Beauchamp's eyes."

"Charles is very perverse sometimes," added Mrs. Gordon; "and he felt to-night his mother could not well decline going to the Duchess's first ball; but we shall find him different to-morrow."

"I hope so," said Conyers, "or he'll find me very different for the time to come, and so I shall tell him plainly enough. I don't like being told black is white; but the fact is, Beauchamp, you and I have outstayed our welcome; and our visits to Grosvenor Square have ceased to be agreeable."

"Who told you so, Mr. Conyers?" asked Malcolm, having, unperceived, entered the room.

"My own common sense, Lord Malcolm, tells me that when an old, tried friend's conduct for acting consistently and uprightly is ridiculed and *pooh-poohed*, as your lordship has thought proper to do this evening, his presence can be no longer desirable."

"I do not choose to be dictated to, Mr. Conyers, by you or any man, in the course I ought to pursue."

"I have never ventured to dictate to your lordship since the time I took the liberty of giving you a few lessons in riding and other athletic exercises; and these, perhaps, are pooh-poohed now as antiquated precepts."

"I shall *never* forget your many acts of kindness to me when a boy, Mr. Conyers, or those of later years," replied Malcolm, considerably mollified.

"Very well, my lord—then if you will balance them against the attentions I have received from Lady Malcolm and yourself since my short stay in town, our account perhaps will stand nearly cancelled. And now, my lord, as you prefer new acquaintances to old faces, Beauchamp and myself propose returning home to-morrow."

"Stay, Conyers," (as he was rising to leave the room,) "I cannot part thus with one who has been to me like an elder brother. What would you have me do?"

"Nothing, my lord. You know as well as myself, what you ought to do; and if you have that respect and regard for Will Beauchamp and his sister which you profess, you know perfectly well what your behaviour should be to any

man who had dared to pass a premiditated slight upon your future brother-in-law; and now, Mrs. Gordon," said Conyers, shaking her by the hand, "I must wish you good bye, and beg you to thank Lady Malcolm for all her kindness and hospitality," with which he hastily left the room, exclaiming, "Come, Beauchamp, I will wait two minutes for you in the hall."

Beauchamp rose quickly, and, taking aunt Gordon's hand, said:—

"I shall call to-morrow at twelve to see Lady Malcolm, and wish Constance good-bye before I leave Town."

"And won't you wish me good-night?" asked Malcolm, as he was turning towards the door.

"Yes, Malcolm," offering his hand, "I do wish you a good-night, and regret I have been the cause of this unpleasant difference between you and Conyers—but I feel assured that no man of feeling could act otherwise than I purpose to do."

"Then I shall see you at twelve to-morrow?" added Malcolm.

"I shall call here at that hour," was the reply, as he ran down-stairs to join his friend.

Mrs. Gordon, overcome by emotion, had quietly left the room; and Lord Malcolm was pacing up and down, in no enviable mood, when his mother entered, and, observing her son's disordered looks, asked what had annoyed him so dreadfully.

"I am vexed to the soul, my dear mother, for having quarrelled with Conyers about such a foolish piece of business as going to this confounded ball—in short, he is right, and I am wrong; but I cannot bear the idea of being dictated to."

"Of course not, Charles—no one likes that, even from their oldest friends—yet there is no reason why you should go at all, or Constance —Blanche and myself will be sufficient."

"We are all in the same boat, my dear mother, according to Bob Conyers' opinion; but as I wish to ascertain from Danby whether he really did intend this omission of Beauchamp as a meditated slight (which, in common fairness, I ought to do before espousing his cause,) I will accompany you there for half-an-hour or so, being fully resolved, if the case is as I now fear, to leave again directly."

"Very well, Charles, then I shall do the same, and order the carriage in an hour exactly from the time we are set down at Castleton House."

Meanwhile, Mrs. Gordon had communicated what had passed to Constance and Blanche, which caused their tears to fall fast.

"Don't vex yourself, my dears, any more, or you will look wretched to-night, although it is very provoking in Charles, who might have given up one ball to oblige those friends who have so often obliged him. But dry your tears, as my sister has left her room; and I will see William early to-morrow, and prevent his leaving Town."

When the ladies descended to the drawing-room, Lord Malcolm, observing his aunt's grave looks, said they had resolved on going to the Duchess's ball, chiefly to ascertain the truth of Beauchamp's surmises; and, if correct, they should leave within the hour. Mrs. Gordon, taking no notice of this remark, Malcolm inquired, "Does not this proposal please you, aunt?"

"It is of little consequence what pleases me, Charles."

"Then you think, aunt, I suppose, we ought not to go at all?"

There was no reply, as at this moment the carriage was announced; but Malcolm, on taking his mother's arm, said:—

"We shall be home in an hour, aunt, if you will sit up till we return."

CHAPTER VI.

On their arrival at Castleton House, Lords Ayrshire and Danby were waiting near the door of the reception-room, and asked Blanche for the honour of her hand. Lord Ayrshire, being first, was not refused.

"May I plead for the second, then, Miss Douglas?" inquired Lord Danby.

"I cannot engage myself for more than one dance," was the reply; "as Lady Malcolm intends remaining a very short time"—with which she and Constance passed on to be presented to the Duchess, Lord Ayrshire following, who, after the ceremony of introduction, offered his arm

to Blanche. Lord Danby, directly afterwards meeting Malcolm, remarked on Miss Douglas's cool reception of him, and asked if he knew the cause.

"Why, to tell you the truth, Danby, Miss Beauchamp feels hurt at her brother not being invited to your party; and these two girls, having been brought up together as sisters, share in each other's feelings and fancies; and an indignity offered to one is felt by the other."

"Oh, indeed, Malcolm, it was quite an oversight of my own in not sending Mr. Beauchamp a card for the occasion; but, from his almost living in Grosvenor Square, I thought he would consider himself included in the invitation to your family."

"Would you have presented yourself at any house, where you were almost a stranger to the heads of the family, on such an implied invitation?"

"Why, I scarcely know, Malcolm."

"Then I can tell you that Beauchamp is quite as proud as yourself; and, having overheard you ask Conyers and Melville, he of course concluded he was purposely excluded."

"Oh, quite an oversight, Malcolm!—I am sorry he should take offence—but our rooms are not spacious enough to contain all our country acquaintances."

"Depend upon it, my lord," replied Malcolm, nettled by this confirmation of Beauchamp's well-grounded deductions, "they will never be large enough to contain Will Beauchamp;" with which he turned away, and seeking Blanche, who was dancing, whispered, "Beauchamp is right—we shall leave as soon as the carriage arrives—so sit with my mother after this quadrille, and I will join you directly it is announced."

Lord Danby muttered to himself, "Confound that Beauchamp, he is ever in the way somewhere, and I suspect it is all true about his engagement to Miss Douglas—but I will find it out;" and hovering near her, he again renewed his suit for the next dance, which was again declined. "How have I been so unfortunate as to incur your displeasure, Miss Douglas? Is it because I omitted to invite Mr. Beauchamp to our ball, which I fear is the case from what Lord Malcolm has been telling me."

"I have informed you, my lord, that Lady Malcolm has ordered the carriage very early, and my cousin begged me to remain with his mother until it arrives, and not to accept another partner."

"And I can answer," replied Lord Ayrshire, "that she has refused at least a dozen others since we have been engaged in this quadrille."

"Then may I hope for the honour of your hand," persisted Lord Danby, "for the first dance to-morrow night at Lady Husselton's, to which, I believe, you are going?"

"It is not yet decided whether we shall be there or not," replied Blanche; "but I do not make engagements of this kind beforehand."

The quadrille being finished, Lord Ayrshire conducted her to Lady Malcolm, where being again solicited for another dance by Lord Henry Bayntun, she made the same excuse.

"Oh, my dear," said Lady Malcolm, "if you wish to dance again, I can wait till the next quadrille is over."

"Charles desired I would not engage myself in another," she replied, "and I think I

see him coming to announce the carriage ;" which was the case.

On their return to Grosvenor Square, Mrs. Gordon had not retired ; and when his mother went up to her room, Lord Malcolm said, " Beauchamp and Conyers have judged rightly ; there can be no doubt now, from what Danby let fall, of the slight being premeditated."

" So we all thought, Charles ; and I only regret you should have allowed your temper to get the ascendancy over your judgment, by ridiculing your friends' opinions."

" You know I hate dictation !" he replied.

" Yet invariably practise it, Charles."

" How so, aunt ?"

" I have observed with deep sorrow your frequent attempts of late to throw discredit or contempt on almost every opinion expressed by William Beauchamp, and your ridicule of his honourable and religious principles ; in short, since his arrival in town, your object appears to have been to make him feel the distinction between Lord Malcolm and Mr. Beauchamp. Now, however quietly he has borne outwardly your taunts and sarcasms, it is impossible that he

does not feel acutely, although it has not been expressed openly, this change in your conduct; the result of which will be the rupture of that friendship which I had hoped and prayed might exist between you to the end of your lives."

"Indeed, aunt, I should be grieved to think as you do, that anything I have said or done could destroy our regard for each other."

"Then, Charles, be more cautious for the future, and bear in mind that true friendship admits of no assumed superiority of one person over another; *you* have assumed that superiority; and observe, it is as I say, *assumed*, since in not one single particular are you superior to him you condescend to call your friend—no, not even in——"

"In what?" enquired Lord Malcolm, as his aunt stopped short.

"I was going to reveal what perhaps I ought not to have mentioned; but as this is the last time I shall ever address you on this subject, I will trust to your honour not to disclose the secret without my permission."

"It shall be strictly observed, aunt—so, pray, proceed!"

"Then, William will become, on the death of an old relative, now near ninety, Lord Beauchamp; and his worthy father Earl of Annandale."

"What!" exclaimed Malcolm, in astonishment, "are you serious, aunt Gordon?"

"I was never more so, Charles!"

"Then, why has he never confided this to me?"

"Because he has seen lately that you rejected his confidence."

Malcolm paced up and down the room in violent agitation, exclaiming, "What a fool—what a madman I have been!"

"Pray, Charles," said Constance, placing her hand on his arm, "pray, do not agitate yourself thus; all will be explained, I hope, to-morrow."

"Yes, my dear girl, indeed it shall; for I feel now how deeply I have wronged your brother, or he had never withheld his confidence from me; and you, Constance — you have known this secret?"

"Yes, Charles, on the condition I did not divulge it even to you."

" And Blanche too ?"

" Of course, Charles."

" To three women has Beauchamp then entrusted its keeping, but not to me !"

" And it has ceased, therefore," rejoined Mrs. Gordon, " to be a wonder, that a woman can keep a secret !"

" Yet I have kept one secret inviolably," added Malcolm.

" Yes, Charles, you have; although poor Blanche has often trembled when its disclosure appeared hovering on your lips."

" My folly and thoughtlessness have been sufficiently punished now, dear aunt, to forbid a repetition of that *badinage* which has caused terror to my cousin, and misery of heart to my friend. Will you forgive me, dear Blanche, for the anxiety I have so thoughtlessly caused you ?"

" Indeed I do, dear Charles," taking his proffered hand, " with all my heart."

" Thank you, my dear girl—it shall never be repeated; and can you forgive me also my unjust, unpardonable conduct to that noble-minded, generous fellow, who, of all men I have

ever yet known, is alone deserving of your love ?"

" Willingly, most willingly, dear Charles, do I forgive all that needs forgiveness from me !"

" And now, dear aunt Gordon, I thank you most heartily for removing the veil from my eyes, and shewing me the many faults I possess."

" Not many, Charles, I am happy to say ; only learn henceforth to respect the feelings and opinions of others, if you wish them to respect yours."

" Let my future conduct prove the deep contrition I feel for the injustice I have done my friends ; and now, aunt," ringing the bell, " I will order some wine and water for these dear girls, who have been worried enough to night,—and then we will all retire to rest."

The next day Beauchamp kept his appointment with Mrs. Gordon, and arriving in Grosvenor Square about twelve o'clock, was ushered into the drawing-room, where Lady Malcolm was sitting with her son, Mrs. Gordon, and the two girls. After shaking hands with all, he approached Lady Malcolm again.

"I could not leave London, dear Lady Malcolm, without expressing in person my grateful thanks for your most friendly and hospitable reception of myself, and your numerous acts of kindness to my dear sister; for which I am and ever shall feel, most deeply obliged."

"But what is the cause of your leaving us so suddenly, William?"

"I will save Beauchamp the necessity of an evasive or indirect reply to your question, my dear mother," interposed Malcolm, "by stating candidly that I am the cause of his leaving town so unexpectedly; what has possessed me, I know not; but I am now fully sensible that my overbearing behaviour to him, of late, has been such as to disgust any man of less command of temper, and less depth of feeling, than him to whose friendship I have, by my foolhardy bantering and obstinacy, justly forfeited all claim."

"From this hour," said Beauchamp, offering Malcolm his hand, "let the past be buried in oblivion, and I trust, for the future, we may be as before to each other."

"As a proof then of your forgiveness, Beau-

champ, will you consent to remain? under my present bitter and reproachful feelings, it would be the greatest consolation and favour you can bestow."

"You must not question the sincerity of my forgiveness, or my willingness to oblige you, Malcolm; but after due consideration last night, I have decided to leave London, and have written to my father to tell him he may expect me to-morrow evening."

"Will nothing induce you to alter that determination, Beauchamp?"

"Nothing that you can now urge, my dear Malcolm; it is for our future happiness that I am thus resolved."

"Enough!" said Malcolm, rising, and scarcely able to suppress his emotion, "I felt it must come to this; but will you see me in my own room a few minutes before you leave the house?"

"Most willingly, Malcolm." He then left the room.

"Can I not prevail on you to prolong your stay, Beauchamp?" enquired Lady Malcolm; "must I also plead in vain?"

"Do not distress me, dear Lady Malcolm, by asking me to do that which every feeling of my heart prompts me to do; but, indeed, it is best for us all that I should now leave you, although if, at the end of a fortnight, you wish to recall me, your summons shall be obeyed."

A double knock at the hall door being heard, Beauchamp rose quickly, and wished Lady Malcolm good bye.

"Come with me into the next room for a few minutes," exclaimed Mrs. Gordon; "the girls and myself must trouble you with a few commissions. You are acting quite right," continued Mrs. Gordon, when the door was closed; "and much as we shall lament your absence, I approve your resolution to go, as it is quite necessary to convince Charles that your feelings are not to be outraged with impunity, although I believe his conduct has only proceeded from thoughtless waywardness—and now, my dear boy, not to prolong the misery of parting, God bless you, good bye, write to me tomorrow, and let me know how your father is, and ride over to the Priory to see how things are going on. Blanche and I are tired of Lon-

don, and shall soon return;" then folding him in her arms, Mrs. Gordon rushed from the room.

It was some little time before Beauchamp could tear himself away from Blanche, whose tears and sobs choked all utterance.

"My own, dear, precious girl, do not give way thus," he murmured, pressing her to his heart; "on my word of honour, I promise you to return any day you wish, if only for a few hours, to see you and Constance. Your summons shall be obeyed without an hour's delay; so if you require my presence, promise to write me without fail."

"I will promise to do so, my own dearly-loved William."

"Now then, dear girl, farewell;" and with another fervent embrace bestowed on her and Constance, Beauchamp was gone. Lord Malcolm used every entreaty in vain to divert his friend from his purpose.

"It must be so now, Malcolm," was his reply, "but I have promised your mother to return at the end of a fortnight, if she sends me an invitation; but really now I must spend a

few days with my father, who has been so long solitary in the country, so good bye, my dear Malcolm, and take care of those two warm-hearted, affectionate girls, for my sake. They have had too much gaiety lately, and if you will oblige me, do not let them go to more than two or three parties in the week—indeed, they cannot stand this unceasing round of dissipation. Am I asking too great a favour, or will it offend Lady Malcolm to decline some invitations for them on my account?"

"My dear fellow, the three parties a week shall be strictly attended to," replied Lord Malcolm, "if I offend all London. The three parties a week shall not be exceeded—there is my hand upon it."

"Many thanks, Malcolm, for your promise, and I hope you will now walk with me to the stables, as I purpose riding home with Conyers, who has, I fear, been kept waiting there a long time."

CHAPTER VII.

After having made up his difference with Conyers, and seen the two friends in their saddles, Malcolm returned to Grosvenor Square, and found his mother alone, Mrs. Gordon having taken the two girls for a quiet drive in the country.

"Beauchamp, my dear mother, has commissioned me to entrust two secrets to your keeping — one being considered of too little moment for any woman to preserve. The first is, that he is heir presumptive to an earldom— the other, that he is in love with Blanche, and she with him."

"The latter, Charles, I have long suspected; but the former, I am surprised to hear, although well aware that the Beauchamps are of a very old and high family."

After a full explanation on these points, Malcolm added, "Now, my dear mother, Beauchamp being, as you may suppose, very anxious about the well-being of our two precious girls, has exacted from me a promise that they shall not be overbaked by too much hot air, *i. e.* overcrowded rooms, which he says has made them look like drooping lilies of the valley, instead of roses, so that they are to be restricted to three balls or parties a week for the future, until he returns; and as Beauchamp's ideas are always right, and mine always wrong, his instructions to me on this point shall be religiously observed to the letter, if I am obliged to lock them up in their rooms the alternate three nights. This being resolved on, your Ladyship must make your selection accordingly from that basket of cards, as the number, three per week, is not to be exceeded."

"Well, Charles, upon the whole this is very agreeable news, and I am delighted with the

bright prospect opening to William Beauchamp, which will also improve Constance's position very materially; but I fear Mrs. Harcourt will not be pleased with Blanche's choice, although, from my great partiality to William, she will find a most firm advocate in me."

"That's right, my dear mother—but bear in mind, this is to be a secret still to all—not a word to Mrs. Harcourt or a breathing soul, until Beauchamp gives us permission to divulge it."

"Don't fear me, Charles, it shall be strictly observed."

Soon after, Mrs. Gordon and the girls returned, when Malcolm acquainted them, before they ascended to the drawing-room, with the communication he had made to his mother by Beauchamp's desire.

"William has acted most wisely and properly," replied Mrs. Gordon; "and now, Charley, you see his confidence in you is replaced."

"All smooth again, aunty dear, with your hair-brained nephew, and you shall see if I don't attend to orders about those two girls."

Lady Malcolm, although rather too much

addicted to gaiety and dissipation, was very warm-hearted, and almost foolishly fond of her only son Charles, who had been a spoilt child (as only children generally are, when left solely to a mother's care). Being naturally attached to her own order, and her acquaintance lying chiefly among the nobility, Lady Malcolm had at first resisted her son's proposal of marriage with Miss Beauchamp, in the hope of his forming a higher connection; but finding remonstrance unavailing, her consent was at last obtained, and she had become every day since more convinced of the wisdom of her son's choice, loving Constance as her own daughter. Her delight, therefore, may be imagined, when so unexpectedly informed of Mr. Beauchamp's certain advancement to the peerage, and William rose considerably in her estimation as a desirable match for her niece; the Earl of Annandale being known as the possessor of very large landed property which went with the title.

Of the small family party at dinner that evening, Lady Malcolm was the only person in buoyant spirits, poor Blanche sitting silent and depressed. When the servants withdrew, she rallied

her niece on her desponding looks. "Come, my dear, cheer up, you will scarcely be presentable at Lady Arnmore's to-night."

"Indeed, dear aunt, I hope you will excuse me going with you there, as I am quite unequal to any exertion this evening."

"Well, my love, you are to do exactly as you please now, in accepting or refusing any invitations; for, to confess the truth, I have accepted many more than I usually do, entirely on your account, in the full expectation, after the impression you have made, of seeing an announcement in the papers, before the conclusion of the season, of a certain little ceremony having been performed at St. George's, Hanover Square, between the Marquis of A. or D. and the beautiful and accomplished Miss Douglas, niece to Lady Malcolm of Grosvenor Square. Of course, my dear, there was a little pardonable vanity, on my side, mixed up in this anticipated *denouement*, but as you appear to think *Lady Beauchamp* a much prettier name—to which I quite agree—with the Countess of Annandale in perspective, I have only been building castles in the air to little purpose, like other enthusiastic

people. Yet, joking apart, my dear Blanche, I thoroughly approve your choice."

Blanche, blushing excessively, expressed her thanks for her aunt's kindness and commendation of her lover, when Malcolm added, "Ah, my dear, that Will Beauchamp is a very Bluebeard already, and what will he become with a title tacked to his name. My gracious! as Mrs. Summertop says, there will be no living in the same house with him. To begin, my love, he has laid an embargo on you, that you are not to attend more than three balls or parties per week, and appointed me keeper of the seals, or private turnkey, to lock you up in your own room every other night after eleven, and it shall be done, Blanche, by Jupiter Ammon! as the old Squire says. Will Beauchamp is a long-headed fellow, and his edicts and opinions are not to be gainsayed; so now, my love, as you don't go with us to-night, I will see you to your room before I leave the house, and take the key in my pocket. Just fancy Ayrshire's astonishment — anticipating, no doubt, a little *tête-à-tête* in his sister's boudoir. 'Are we not to have the honour of seeing Miss Douglas to-

night?' 'Oh, no, my lord, can't come—very naughty—locked in her room—here's the key.'"

"Oh, Charles, Charles," exclaimed Mrs. Gordon, "can't you spare your cousin this one night—are your promises so soon forgotten!"

Blanche burst into tears, and was escaping from the table, when Malcolm sprang from his chair, and throwing himself before her on one knee, seized her hand, exclaiming, "Oh! Blanche, my dear soft-hearted girl, will you forgive my ill-timed foolery? but, indeed, I thought to rouse your spirits; that was my only motive, on my honour."

"Dear Charles, I believe you," she replied; "but my heart is too full now to bear even a joke—pray let me go to my room."

"So you shall, my love," opening the door for her; "but do you forgive me?"

"She may; but I shall not, Charles," interposed Mrs. Gordon, taking her niece's arm and leading her away.

The fourth morning after Beauchamp had left London, Mrs. Gordon received a very affectionate letter from him, with another enclosed for Blanche, written in the most affectionate

terms, and enjoining her to be more careful of herself for his sake; telling her also that, having felt persuaded of Lady Malcolm's motives in taking her to so many parties, and witnessing her decreasing health and strength from such excessive dissipation, he had deemed it expedient to make her ladyship acquainted with their relative position, which he hoped would at once put a stop to that incessant whirl of gaiety. After having perused the contents half-a-dozen times in her own room, Blanche sought Mrs. Gordon.

"There, dear aunt, I must show you this kind, affectionate letter from my own dear William, which has made me so very happy."

"Then you can read mine in the mean time, my love, which has put me also in high spirits."

Next to the pleasure of seeing those we love, is the enjoyment of seeing their hand-writing when separated from us, and the delight of Mrs. Gordon and her niece on perusing Beauchamp's heart-stirring terms of endearment to them both (though rather differently worded as applied to each) is easier to imagine than describe. Lord

Malcolm, after a severe lecture from his aunt, now ceased his bantering tone towards his cousin, endeavouring by every attention to make amends for his late conduct to herself and her lover, who, it must be confessed, from the recent disclosure of his high expectations, had become a person of much greater importance than heretofore. Instead of confining them to the hot dusty ride in the park, Malcolm now accompanied the two girls on horseback into the country almost every day, and Lord Ayrshire, noticing the hour at which they generally left Grosvenor Square, frequently joined them, although Malcolm gave him no cause for encouragement, by pertinaciously adhering to his cousin's side, leaving Constance to be entertained by the Marquis.

As the family in Grosvenor Square were loitering over a late breakfast, a few days after Beauchamp's departure from town, an unexpected visitor was ushered into the room, in the person of his cousin. "Why, Fred!" exclaimed Malcolm, greeting him warmly, "who would have thought of seeing you in the mighty Babylon—anything amiss at Bampton?"

"Oh, no, Malcolm! all right in that quarter."

"Then what brought you here, if it is not an impertinent question?"

"A certain vehicle called a coach, with four as spicy nags as you could wish to sit behind, from our last stage at Hounslow."

"Well, that I can suppose; but you are not much of a city mouse."

"True enough, Malcolm; but you know one fool makes many, and as Bob Conyers and all the rest of our country neighbours have set the example, you see I have been fool enough to follow it, and take a peep at London life, since it's deuced dull work in the provinces just now. Will returning to do a bit of kennel with the young entry, I've got leave of absence from the governor to have a shy at the Londoners."

"Ay, ay, Fred, I see how it is; Beauchamp has sent you up here to look after us all."

"Begging your pardon, my Lord, Will is too knowing a fellow to send a mad-cap like myself on such an errand, lest I might do a little business on my own account in a certain quarter," with a smile and look at Blanche. "No, no, Malcolm, I should in that case be like the monkey roasting chestnuts."

"Well, Fred, we are all right glad to see you, and as Will won't look at a certain young widow in a matrimonial point of view, egad, I think she will just suit your book, *id est*, if you can take up the running."

"Then, Malcolm, I've no objection to try my luck, provided she is likely to suit."

During this dialogue, broken at intervals, Fred had shaken hands with the ladies, and answered various little enquiries anent country friends and country affairs, when Malcolm rising, said, "Well, Fred, you dine with us this evening, as a matter of course, and we go to Almack's afterwards, when I will introduce you to the widow."

"I hardly know what to say to that proposition, and don't think I can sport brass enough for such an august assembly."

"Pooh, pooh, Fred! you have brass enough for any thing—faint heart, you know, won't do in these cases."

Constance here interposed, saying, if he would accompany them, Blanche would accept him as her first partner.

"Well, Con, that of course decides the matter."

"And if not wilfully disposed to turn restive," she added, "we will enlist you in our service for the whole of the day, as I have a hundred little things to talk about before the dinner hour."

"I am quite at your service, my fair cousin," replied Fred, "so do with me as you please."

"Well, then, we will take a drive after luncheon in aunt Gordon's carriage, as I know your dislike to drawing-room work, and show you the belles in the park on our return."

Malcolm having an engagement, soon after left the ladies and Fred to get through their time until the carriage came to the door. Various conjectures were hazarded on Fred Beauchamp's appearance in Mrs. Gordon's carriage, by the noble Marquis, until he encountered Captain Markham, who at once solved the mystery. "What! another bumpkin of the Beauchamp family, Markham?"

"Eh! 'pon honour, Ayrshire, you don't fancy the name much; but, my fine fellow, take care Fred don't hear you call him a bumpkin, or—"

"What, Markham?"

"You'll have to attend a little meeting somewhere in the country pretty soon."

The Marquis turning away, muttered, "Ah, another fool in my path, I suppose."

On Fred's standing up at Almack's in the first quadrille that night with Blanche Douglas, he had to undergo the ordeal of a first appearance in public or fashionable life, which not altogether relishing, he remarked to his partner: "Some of those dowagers will know me again, I conclude, although my Lord Danby gave me the cut direct just now. By Jove! if I meet him again in the hunting field, he shall have cause to remember me to the last hour of his life."

"Don't speak so loud, Fred," she whispered, "he is just behind us."

"So much the better, Blanche—I hope he heard me; but—I beg pardon—perhaps he is in favour again with yourself?"

"Oh no, Fred, that is certainly not the case; nor likely to be."

"Glad to hear it, for I hate fellows who know men only in the country. But, to judge by appearances, you seem to have a good many

strings to your bow—or in other words, a rather long list of admirers."

"And yet, Fred, I would much rather be at Bamp——, I mean the Priory, than joining in all this gaiety."

"Why not have said Bampton, Blanche, at once?"

"Well, I might have said so," she replied, "as I never enjoy any thing more than a visit to the old Squire."

"Except, Blanche, a visit to the young one."

"Don't be impertinent, Master Fred," was the rejoinder; "or I shall cut you, like Lord Danby."

"Oh, very well; but I wonder of whom poor Will, in his solitary den, is thinking at this moment?"

A shadow passed over the features of Blanche Douglas at these words, which was broken by Fred's saying—

"Don't mistrust me, dear Blanche, for Fred Beauchamp can jump over or see through a stone wall as quickly as most people; although neither Will nor yourself will honour me with

your confidence; but there — perhaps you are right, as I am a giddy, thoughtless fellow, and might let the cat's head peep out of the bag."

"I do not doubt your sincerity, Fred—but this is forbidden ground."

"I know it, Blanche; and my sincere hope is, it may not be so much longer."

The dance over, Constance introduced her cousin to Mrs. Fortescue, with whom he seemed much struck; and they were soon seen dancing together in high good humour. The widow endeavoured, ineffectually, to ascertain the cause of his cousin's abrupt departure from London. "It was rumoured," she remarked, "he had left in consequence of being rejected by a certain young lady, with whom you were dancing this evening."

"That, you may take my word," replied Fred, "is a malicious falsehood. Will Beauchamp never has been, and never will be, rejected by any woman."

"Do you consider him then perfectly irresistible?" with an arch smile.

"Oh, no, not quite that; but he has good sense enough never to propose before being quite certain that he would be accepted."

"Then he did not propose to Miss Douglas before leaving town?"

"Certainly not."

"Well, really, the world is very ill-natured; but perhaps he is engaged to some one else?"

"Not to my knowledge; although he does not confide secrets of this kind to me."

"Probably he has a *penchant* for some young lady who lives in your neighbourhood?"

"That, I suspect, is the case," replied Fred; "but more I cannot, if I would, tell."

Mrs. Fortescue had heard too much now, and relapsed into a thoughtful mood, from which she was rallied in turn, by Fred Beauchamp saying, "You appear to take rather a deep interest in my cousin's love affairs. Is he a very old friend of yours?"

"Not very," was the reply; and a deeper tint stole over her cheeks; "but we met several times during his short stay in town, and I liked him very much, from being so different to the generality of our fops and fine gentlemen. But don't you think Miss Douglas exceedingly lovely?"

"Ah, yes," replied Fred, "beautiful—too beau-

tiful—but I look at her as I do at a splendid three hundred-guinea horse—beyond my reach ; and her guardian, Harcourt, will have a peer for his ward, nothing short will do for the heiress. So you see my falling in love with her is a hopeless affair."

" Then you confess to being in love with her, Mr. Beauchamp ?"

" I won't deny," he replied, " that I have been in that predicament; but the fit has passed, as others have before; in short, since the age of fourteen, I have always been the slave of Cupid. First, I was smitten by a housemaid at our school, a buxom young lady, nearly six feet high, who knocked out the first flame by knocking me off a high-backed chair, on which I had perched myself to snatch a kiss from my enchantress. In falling against the edge of the table, a black eye was the consequence, for which, not being able to give a satisfactory explanation to our master, who declared I had been fighting with another boy, I got a thorough good flogging. This cooled my courage for a twelvemonth ; after which I had a desperate affair with the daughter of the village school-master—pos-

sessing a very red face, snub nose, and black, glossy ringlets. The flame being reciprocal, clandestine meetings, billets doux, and little presents followed; but one from my dulcinea, a lock of hair, nearly extinguished the fire, as well as your humble servant at the same time."

"Pray, may I ask how, Mr. Beauchamp?"

"Oh, certainly, if it will afford you any satisfaction to know how silly I was in my teens. Well, you must know then, that of this precious lock I swallowed one hair per night at bed time —such was the devouring nature of my passion."

"Really, Mr. Beauchamp," exclaimed the gay widow, laughing at the drollery of the thing, "you must be joking now, to see how much *I can swallow.*"

"Well may you laugh at such an absurdity!" continued Fred, "but, 'pon honour, it is perfectly true. I had nearly eaten up the lock, hair by hair, when one night, from an over-exciting meeting with my beloved, I took an extra allowance, two or three together, which, sticking in my throat, nearly choked me; in short, I had a *hair*-breadth escape of my life, from being

patted on the back by the strapping housemaid —who came in to take our candles away—until the breath was knocked out of my body."

"Oh, Mr. Beauchamp, how very ridiculous!"

"Yes, ridiculous enough; and it surprises me now to think how I ever could have been such a ninny."

"Well, but how did this love affair terminate?"

"Rather tragically; my master having caught me kneeling at my fair one's feet one evening in a secluded arbour, gave me a precious good caning, upbraiding me the while for being a sallow-faced, hook-nosed, sparrow-legged dog, in the presence of the young lady, by which my *amour propre* was more hurt than my back; and my enchantress not exhibiting much compassion at my distressed situation, but rather inclined, I thought, to titter at these insulting epithets, flame, number two, was thus quickly put out. I had, it is true, formed a desperate resolution of covering my shame and love together in a duck-pond; but the water looked so extremely dark and disgusting, that the idea of spoiling a new

pair of white trowsers saved me. Since then, with the exception of looking at Blanche Douglas in the same light as a cat is said to look at a king, from a respectful distance, I have preserved a very decided antipathy to throw myself at any young lady's feet. In short, before committing myself the third time, which it is said pays for all, but how is not sufficiently explained, I purpose advancing very cautiously, by asking my third flame, as a preliminary to further proceedings, whether I *may* fall in love with her or not."

"You have given me a very amusing account of yourself, Mr. Beauchamp; and I can only wish you success in your next adventure."

"Thank you, Mrs. Fortescue—but will you assist me also, in case I meet a lady here to-night, who takes my fancy?"

"Oh, certainly," she replied, laughing; "if I have any influence with the fair one."

"A thousand thanks," he replied, gaily. "I shall not forget your promise; and now, I conclude, our dance being ended, I must thank you for the honour you have done me in accepting my hand, and wish you good night."

They thus parted, and it must be confessed that Fred's handsome person and unaffected manners made a favourable impression on the young widow.

CHAPTER VIII.

BEAUCHAMP's sudden disappearance from London, coupled with the unusual gravity of Blanche's demeanour since his departure, gave weight to the rumour originating with Lord Ayrshire, that he had been rejected by the heiress, which imparted fresh impulse to his hopes, as well as to her other admirers—except Lord Danby, who was puzzled how to account for Lord Malcolm's coolness to him since his mother's ball.

"I cannot understand them," observed Lord Danby to Ayrshire one day, when they were discussing the subject. "Malcolm has certainly taken offence at my not inviting Beauchamp,

and Miss Douglas, too, by her altered manner when we meet; in fact, she will scarcely speak to me;—how then can Beauchamp be rejected?"

"Simply enough, my dear fellow. Malcolm and his cousin may both like Beauchamp well enough—too well to pass over any slight offered to him;—but, depend upon it, Lady Malcolm looks higher for her niece, and therefore the young country squire has had his dismissal—nothing more likely, and I am satisfied in my own mind this is the fact."

"Well, Ayrshire, I quite agree with you that this is a very natural solution of the mystery; and knowing before her guardian's decided objection to this young pretender, I think it more than probable that he has been ordered to the right-about."

Blanche's returning cheerfulness, after the receipt of Beauchamp's letter, tended also to impress Lord Ayrshire (who had joined them again in their ride that afternoon) with the idea that the wound inflicted on the heart of Miss Douglas by her lover's dismissal was one of a very superficial character, and he argued with himself:

"Ah, young girls brought up in the country

have always some bumpkin hankering about them, with whom they fancy themselves terribly in love, until the delusion is dispelled by their coming to London and meeting well-bred, polite men of the world; they then wonder at the absurdity of their first foolish, romantic *penchant* for a fellow who has not two ideas in his head, beyond the price of corn and cattle; and whose fund of entertainment consists of a few thread-bare sporting anecdotes, too coarse for a lady's ear. A few tears, of course, at parting; and, by the end of the first week, Colin is forgotten!"

There was another cause, also, for Blanche's cheerfulness—Lady Malcolm's knowledge and full approval of her choice, which she believed would carry great weight with her guardian; so that she felt comparatively at ease on that point, and in good humour with every one and every thing around her. On this morning her pretty Arab obtained an unusual share of caresses and pattings from the hand of his fair mistress, and Lord Ayrshire's sparkling conversation elicited her approving smiles.

It was now the Harcourts' turn for a grand display—invitations having been issued a month

previously, to ensure a full attendance for a ball to take place that night; and it being generally known by this time that Mr. Harcourt was Miss Douglas's guardian, admittance to their party was eagerly sought by all the fashionable young men about town. Mrs. Harcourt, as may be supposed, derived no trifling satisfaction from observing the crowd of aristocratic admirers pressing round her niece, all anxious for a share of her smiles; but Lord Ayrshire, from his great wealth, and as leader of ton, had become her especial favourite.

After having met Mr. Harcourt at Lady Malcolm's, the Marquis continued his acquaintance, cards were exchanged, and invitations followed, so that the two families were now on visiting terms, and Lord Ayrshire had dined in Upper Brook Street two or three times previously to the Harcourts' ball, when he ingratiated himself into the lady's favour by bestowing the most high-flown panegyrics on her niece, declaring her, without exception, the belle of the season. Mrs. Harcourt in turn descanted on her many amiable qualities, and gave a glowing description of her fine mansion and large landed

property in Scotland, with a hint of their expectations that she would form some suitable alliance. Having made these preliminary observations, Mrs. Harcourt flattered herself that, before the close of the season, she should see her niece Marchioness of Ayrshire; and so in all probability she would, had Blanche been ambitious of this distinction.

On this night, Lady Arnmore, sitting near Mrs. Harcourt, when her brother was dancing with Miss Douglas, remarked, "I have never seen George so unremittingly attentive to any young lady as he has been to Miss Douglas since our first ball. We have long given him up as a confirmed bachelor, but I really begin to think he is caught at last, and now for the first time seriously in love."

"My niece," replied Mrs. Harcourt, thinking to enhance her value, "has very peculiar ideas on marriage, and having a splendid fortune of her own, will neither marry for title nor money alone."

"Well really, Mrs. Harcourt, they appear mutually pleased with each other at present. Miss Douglas is the very person to suit my

brother, and provided he is sufficiently agreeable to her, I think it will be a case for St. George's Chapel ere long."

The fact was that Blanche, having met several of her old country friends that night — the Markhams, Rollestons, Comptons, and others—felt more at home and in higher spirits than usual, which Lord Ayrshire interpreting in his favour, and attributing to his own very delightful society, presumed to ask for a second dance. That request, reminding her at once of her absent lover's advice on this point, caused an instantaneous revulsion of feeling and gravity of features. The thought passed like a flash of lightning through her mind. "What would he say to my gaiety to-night, whilst he is sitting at his lonely fireside, thinking of his own dear Blanche?" For a moment she became lost in reverie, but on the question being repeated by Lord Ayrshire, she replied, with some appearance of hauteur, "I have made a rule, my Lord, never to dance twice on the same night with any partner."

"There are exceptions to all general rules, Miss Douglas, and I hope you will permit me

o claim the privilege of being an exception to yours."

"I am sorry, my Lord, I cannot grant you that privilege," was the reply.

"Then do you really never make any exception to this rigid rule?"

"Very rarely, and only in favour of very old friends."

"Of whom, Miss Douglas, I conceive you must know very few who would be likely to ask for your hand in a ball room."

"Whether few or many," replied Blanche, highly offended, "the Marquis of Ayrshire has not been known to me long enough to be included in that number."

"I beg a thousand pardons for giving this unintentional offence, but my meaning was that very old people are not generally very partial to dancing."

"And yet, my Lord, my very old friends need not necessarily be very old persons; for instance, my cousin Malcolm, who is only a few years older than myself; but having known him from childhood, he is one of my very oldest friends."

"I stand corrected, Miss Douglas, for my futile attempt at jocularity, which appears to have been exceedingly ill timed; but, believe me, no reflection whatever was intended on your friends."

Blanche made no reply, and Lord Ayrshire puzzled his brain in vain to account for her unexpected transition from light good humour to grave formality. But the dance being concluded, he was obliged to resign her hand without the opportunity of obtaining any further elucidation.

On entering the room that night, Selina Markham had suggested that they should sit through one quadrille together to have a chat, to which Blanche assented. "You are almost danced off your legs, my dear, and were I in your place, I would see half these fine fellows smothered in the Serpentine mud before I would fag myself to death by accepting them for partners, night after night, as you do. So hold yourself engaged to me—as I have a little bit of gossip to talk about—for one quadrille."

"Won't it look very strange, Selina, for us both to be sitting together?"

"Not in the least, my dear, only missed our partners—or they missed us—nothing more common in such crowds as these."

At the appointed time, therefore, the two girls ensconced themselves in the most retired seats of the apartments they could select, hoping to escape observation.

"There, I declare," exclaimed Selina, "that jackanapes Bayntun has found us out already;" as he approached with, "May I have the honour, Miss Douglas?"

"No, you can't," said Selina, "she's engaged as well as myself."

"Very odd, Miss Markham, that you should both have lost your partners."

"Your Lordship is always thinking about the odds," replied Selina, "but, whether odd or even, we hav'n't lost our partners, and as you can keep a stable secret, I will tell you a ball-room one. We are both tired of dancing, and therefore have decided on a little respite. You know what running a horse off his legs means, so have a little compassion on Miss Douglas."

"Then will you allow me the next dance after this, Miss Douglas?"

An assent being given, Selina added, "On the condition that you leave us now to ourselves," with which Lord Henry bowed and withdrew.

"Well, my dear Blanche, what a bore it must be to be a belle, listening night after night to all the soft twaddle of so many soft heads. I declare it would drive me distracted, or send me to sleep, and I advise you to pick out half-a-dozen of your best and richest admirers to choose from, and turn the rest adrift, for it is high time to make up your mind, and select one pet to keep the others off from so continually pestering you with their attentions. *A propos*, the *on dit* is, in well-informed circles, that Lady Malcolm has given Will Beauchamp his *congé* for proposing to her niece, and that his travelling ticket was made out at a moment's notice, and it does appear very strange that he left in such a vast hurry, without the slightest notice to any one."

"And pray, Selina, of whom did you hear this news?"

"My brother Ned says it is the general talk at the clubs, where, by the way, there is more

gossip discussed than at any old woman's tea-party. Those clubs, my dear, are the cause of quarrels and dissensions among married couples, almost innumerable, and mischief incalculable —destructive of connubial bliss;—for, on the slightest pretences, the husband flies off to his club—then somewhere else—and leaves his poor young wife moping at home. In short, I recommend you to make it a condition in your marriage articles, that the Marquis is to resign his club, or forfeit an additional thousand a-year to you as pin-money."

"What Marquis are you talking of, Selina?"

"Oh, *the* Marquis, *par excellence*—the all-accomplished, all-learned, most agreeable, most rich, most noble Marquis of Ayrshire; who, report says, has laid all his honours, riches, and his own proud, supercilious, precious person, at your feet."

"My dear Selina, you are talking great nonsense—he has done nothing of the kind."

"Ah, well, my dear, then that honour is in store for you. A pleasure only deferred."

"You are quite mistaken, Selina; such an idea, perhaps, has never entered into his head;

but our *tête-à-tête* is at an end, as I see Lord Henry approaching."

Selina, with the curiosity natural to her sex, was very anxious to ascertain how her friend stood in regard to Beauchamp and Lord Ayrshire; the latter being openly spoken of as the object of her selection from the host of her other admirers. But Blanche possessed sufficient caution never to betray her secret; and left Selina in the dark as to her true feelings.

The next morning, at breakfast, she received a few hurried lines from Beauchamp, informing her that his father had just been summoned to attend the Earl of Annandale, who, being considered by his physician in a declining state, and not likely to recover, they were setting off immediately for the north; but that she should hear from him again, on his arrival at Annandale Castle.

On this intelligence being communicated to Malcolm, he exclaimed:—

"My stars! Blanche, here's a go! as Selina says, Lord Beauchamp and my Lady Constance! Why, Con, I suppose you will order me to the right-about at once; and, as to my Lord Beauchamp, there will be no bearing him now."

"Titles, or riches, will never alter either one or the other, Charles," said Mrs. Gordon; "and I am quite sure that William will never rejoice at any man's death, although that should open his path to title and wealth."

"Of course not, my dear aunt—but, as people now-a-days do not attain the age of Methuselah, when a man has counted ninety years, he cannot reasonably complain that his span of life has been cut very short; and this event, whenever it may happen, will place Beauchamp in a position to render Blanche independent of her guardian's powers or favours."

Immediately after breakfast, Malcolm conveyed the news to his mother, who could not suppress her delight at the prospect of her future daughter-in-law's advancement, as well as at Beauchamp's elevation to a higher sphere. "And now, Charles," she added, "I suppose the secret may be disclosed?"

"Oh, no, my dear mother—our lips are sealed until Beauchamp allows us to open them—that was the condition; and our promises must be faithfully maintained. Moreover, the event has not yet happened; and should the old peer take

a fresh lease, we should only be laughed at and despised for reckoning our chickens before they are hatched."

The same afternoon, when Blanche and Constance, with Malcolm and Fred, had set out for their usual ride, Mr. Harcourt called in Grosvenor Square, and, finding Lady Malcolm at home, opened his commission by informing her of the joyful realisation of his and Mrs. Harcourt's wishes, that morning, by a proposal from the Marquis of Ayrshire for her niece's hand. "This is really quite beyond our expectations, Lady Malcolm, as the Marquis is enormously rich; and he has offered, in the most handsome manner, to settle the whole of her fortune, with a large addition from his own, strictly upon herself, in case of his decease, and five thousand a-year entirely at her own disposal during his life."

"Very liberal indeed," replied Lady Malcolm, rather coolly.

"Then I presume, on the part of your niece, your Ladyship will at once accept Lord Ayrshire's proposals, as I believe she has already given him sufficient encouragement to expect a favourable answer."

"There, Mr. Harcourt, I think Lord Ayrshire must be under some delusion; as, from my own observation, Blanche has *not* given him any encouragement at all; in fact, from his Lordship's well-known character of playing the flirt with young girls, she received a caution from me at first to be on her guard; and I do not believe she ever entertained the most remote idea of accepting his attentions as a suitor—although finding him agreeable enough as an acquaintance.

"I am quite astonished, Lady Malcolm, at this unexpected intelligence. What can any girl be thinking of, to refuse such an offer?"

"Perhaps, Mr. Harcourt, she may be thinking of some one else she likes better."

"May I beg the favour, then, of your Ladyship informing me of the name of the person whom Miss Douglas prefers to the Marquis of Ayrshire."

"That, at present, I am not in a position to reveal, Mr. Harcourt."

"It is manifest, however, that your Ladyship is aware there is such a person, and, as the guardian of Miss Douglas, I hope Lady Malcolm will not think me too presuming in saying

that I have a right to know the gentleman's name—probably Mr. Beauchamp, or some needy adventurer in want of her fortune."

"Needy adventurers, Mr. Harcourt, are not very likely to obtain my sanction, any more than your own, and it is neither decorous nor complimentary in you to speak in such terms to me, who take an equal, if not superior, interest in my niece's welfare. Yet, as her guardian, I will tell you thus much; the person to whom I allude has as yet made no direct proposal to me for her hand, and therefore it would be premature to mention his name; but I may say that he is heir to one of the richest earldoms in England, and in other respects quite unexceptionable."

"I am to understand, then, that your Ladyship, for my ward, positively declines the Marquis of Ayrshire?"

"Believing that her affections are engaged elsewhere, and certainly knowing that his Lordship would not be accepted, I think it would be needless to give any other answer," replied Lady Malcolm, "although we both must feel highly flattered by his Lordship's preference."

Mr. Harcourt, failing to obtain any further information, soon after took his leave, and communicated the result of his interview with Lady Malcolm by letter to his Lordship, whose annoyance and irritation at being rejected was so visible that his sister divined the cause.

"I guess the contents of the letter just delivered, George," she said,—"a refusal from Miss Douglas."

"Yes, my dear Charlotte, it is indeed true, and I feel more chagrined and angry than pained, although I must confess to have taken a deeper interest in Miss Douglas than any girl I have ever known; but pray, for my reputation at the clubs, don't give a hint even to Arnmore about this business, and I will see Harcourt directly, and obtain his silence also. Were it known in fashionable circles, my travels must be resumed, as I should be the laughing-stock of half London. The fastidious Marquis rejected by a young country girl! would be handed and bandied about by all the Lady Marys and Lady Fannys, rendering my presence here quite insupportable."

"Well, George, on my own account, as well

as on yours, not a word shall escape my lips; but Lord Malcolm and his mother, how will you manage with them?"

"Oh, very well; Malcolm and I are old friends."

"And the young lady herself?"

"With her, I am quite safe; she has too much good sense and proper feeling ever to utter a word derogatory to any person, and notwithstanding my rejection, I must always esteem her."

CHAPTER IX.

When Blanche returned from her ride, Lady Malcolm told her of Mr. Harcourt's visit, and the answer she had given him.

"Have I done right, my love, in peremptorily refusing the Marquis?"

"Oh yes, dear aunt Malcolm, I am so much obliged by your great kindness in saving me from a scene with Mr. and Mrs. Harcourt; but I am surprised at Lord Ayrshire addressing them on such a subject, after I have so frequently checked every advance he has made to a more intimate acquaintance. Indeed the night of Mrs. Harcourt's ball, when making some

allusion to my friends, I gave him distinctly to understand, in very plain language, that the Marquis of Ayrshire had never been considered by me one of that number."

"Well, my dear, you acted quite right in undeceiving him, and if he was wilfully blind, you cannot be blamed for leading him astray."

On the third evening after this communication, as they were all sitting together, with the dessert on the table—the butler entered the room, saying, "There is a man, my Lord, in the hall, with a parcel, which he will not deliver to any one but your Lordship."

"What the deuce does the fellow mean?" exclaimed Malcolm, springing up from his chair.

"I think he said, my Lord, he was the guard of the Northern mail."

"Show him in here, then."

The man, entering with a low bow, said, "I am intrusted with a parcel to deliver only into the hands of Lord Malcolm, from Annandale Castle, who is to pay me a sovereign, and send back an answer by myself; as I shall be on the road again to-morrow morning by four o'clock."

"I am the person," replied Malcolm, "so sit

down a moment in that chair, and here's something to wash the cobwebs out of your throat," placing a bottle of wine and a glass in his hands.

Tearing open the parcel, three letters appeared, all in Beauchamp's handwriting. "Here, aunt, and Blanche, one apiece for you, and the other for myself," the contents of which he hastily ran through, and then handing it to his mother, observed, "No ball-going to-night, my dear mother, as Con must be off."

"Who gave you the parcel, my man?" enquired Malcolm.

"A young gentleman at the Lodge gate gave it to my fellow guard, my Lord, and I think they called him Mr. or Lord Beauchamp, I won't be sure which; so if your Lordship will be kind enough to send a receipt of the contents inside that same paper, I shall be glad, as I've got a cab waiting to go back into the city."

This was soon done by Malcolm writing a few lines, and sealing up the parcel as before, which he handed to the guard, with a couple of sovereigns. "You will be sure this is delivered safe."

"No fear of that, my Lord, when sent by

such paymasters—salve like this suits my complaint exactly, my lord ;" with which, and a low bow to the ladies, the guard disappeared.

The purport of Beauchamp's three letters was the same—that the Earl of Annandale, having heard from him about his sister, was very desirous of seeing her, and had, to defray her expenses, insisted on sending her a draft on London for two hundred pounds. A postscript was added, in which Beauchamp advised her setting off immediately, as the poor old Earl was evidently declining very fast.

" Well, Con," exclaimed Malcolm, " we must leave at daybreak to morrow, if dear aunty will go with us?"

" Indeed I will, Charles, most gladly ; so now, my dears, we had better at once prepare for our journey."

Beauchamp's letter to Blanche was very long and very affectionate, which caused her eyes to fill with tears as she handed it to Lady Malcolm, saying, " Dear aunt, you may judge now whether I ought to love him as I do."

Lady Malcolm took the letter with her to the drawing-room to read, whilst the two girls went

up-stairs to make the necessary preparations. Beauchamp gave an account of their arrival at the Castle, and the affecting meeting of his father and the old Earl, who had been great friends in early life. Then his scrutiny of himself, to see if he could discover any family likeness—his being made to sit down by his side and give a full description of his sister, with the Earl's impatience to have her sent for without delay; "and now, my own dear girl," continued Beauchamp, "I must finish this letter, reserving a description of the place to another day, and in conclusion I only add, that, for your dear sake, I cannot forbear feeling elated at the prospect of that barrier being removed to our union, which, with your guardian's prejudices and worldly ideas, never could have been passed by Mr. William Beauchamp, although, on his own account, he would as soon remain plain Mr. Beauchamp to the end of his life, than by one ambitious or avaricious thought do violence to his own feelings by desiring the death of the poor old Earl. He appears, though eccentric, very warm-hearted, and of a generous, noble mind, and it shall be my study to afford him every comfort

and consolation which a young man may offer, during the short time which, I fear, remains to him of his now fast waning mortal career."

When Blanche descended to the drawing-room, Lady Malcolm returned the letter with the remark, "Were anything, my dear girl, wanting to confirm my high opinion of your lover's worth, the beautiful sentiments there expressed would be more than sufficient, and to convince me also that you cannot love him more than he deserves."

Malcolm, that evening, was more like a boy packing up on leaving school for the holidays, and aunt Gordon was obliged several times to reprove him for his levity.

"Well but, aunty dear, who would not enjoy the prospect of a two-hundred-mile journey, with four posters rattling along fourteen miles an hour, and all the expenses paid — the fresh breezes fanning our faces as we whirl along. Oh! it will be quite delightful after the hot dusty rides through the suburbs of this mighty smoky Babylon,—and the handling of some of those thundering big trout in the large lake before the Castle! By Jove! aunty, but that

will be fine fun, and supply her Ladyship's table without sending to the fishmongers."

The next morning, our travellers set out on their journey at five o'clock in the morning, and reached their destination the second evening. The old Earl was greatly pleased with Constance, and received Mrs. Gordon and Malcolm in the most friendly manner, and from that time the two ladies, from their gentle, unremitting attentions, became two administering angels in his sight.

"Ah, my dear, kind friends," exclaimed the old man, a few days after their arrival, "how many happy years have I lost, by not being acquainted with you before, and all owing to my old-fashioned, crabbed habits, in living more like a hermit in his cell than a reasonable being."

Finding his end drawing near, the Earl sent for his legal adviser, and made great alterations in his will, appointing Mr. Beauchamp and his son sole executors, and bequeathing (after a few legacies to distant connections and his old domestics) the residue of his personal estate, amounting to upwards of two hundred thousand pounds in the funds, to Constance. William

Beauchamp, having become a great favourite, was sent for to the Earl's private room, to ascertain his views on particular points, and to be entrusted with some confidential communications.

"I wish to know, my young friend, your opinion how the services of my old faithful servants should be rewarded, and to see if your ideas agree with mine. The old housekeeper will want another home when I am gone."

"No, my Lord," replied Beauchamp, "that she shall never require as long as she prefers remaining here. My father and myself will never dismiss one of your old favourites. The butler, housekeeper, head keeper, and gardener shall never leave their present situations, except at their own desire."

"But I have left each of them a hundred a year after my decease."

"Well, my Lord," replied Beauchamp, "I think they well deserve it, and should they prefer living by themselves, instead of occupying their present apartments in the Castle (in which it is our wish to continue them), we will add another fifty pounds yearly to each, in the place of wages."

"Then, my dear boy, there are my old pets, horses, dogs, and I know not what, and the books and furniture in my own sitting-room, which I do not wish removed."

"All shall remain in their present position, my dear Lord—even the sparrows at your window shall not be molested. But why trouble yourself with these harrowing details? for believe me, on the word of a true Beauchamp, every wish of your heart shall be religiously observed by my father and myself. Give me only your instructions, and they shall be carefully carried out."

"I am content, my dear boy, for I see in your face candour and kindness of disposition combined, and I will trust you implicitly."

"Thank you, my dear Lord, for that confidence, which shall never be abused."

"One wish still remains ungratified, William—can it be realized?"

"If in my power, you have only to mention it."

"I long to see your future bride, of whom Constance and Mrs. Gordon have given me such a glowing description."

"You shall see her, by God's permission, as soon as horses can convey her to Annandale Castle; and I am sure Lord Malcolm will most willingly set out to London immediately for that purpose."

Malcolm, who enjoyed travelling, left by the mail that same night, and returned the third evening with Blanche, who was delighted to leave London, and join once more in the country all those she loved. As the old Earl, holding her hand in his, gazed on her lovely features and soft beaming eyes, he exclaimed, "Your friends, my dear, have not done you justice—even their glowing description comes far short of the reality. Accept an old man's best thanks for complying with his last earthly wish, although it was not from mere curiosity alone I desired to see you here, and have occasioned you a long, tiresome journey."

"To afford you the least comfort or satisfaction, my Lord, I would willingly have travelled twice that distance."

"Thank you, my dear, for that pretty speech, and now Mrs. Gordon will kindly show you to your room."

"Well, my dear boy," remarked the Earl, when she had left them, "you are one of the most fortunate men in the world to have secured the affections of that sweet, lovely girl."

"Indeed, my dear Lord, she is far beyond my deserts, and I am most thankful and grateful for such a treasure."

"Yes, my boy, and so you ought to be, although in my opinion you both appear exactly suited to each other."

The next morning Blanche took a short stroll with Beauchamp before breakfast, and on returning with the colour mantling in her cheek, the old Earl appeared fascinated with her radiant beauty, and unable to withdraw his eyes from her face. He whispered to Mrs. Gordon, "Your dear, gentle niece looks like a being from a brighter sphere, with that angelic smile and dazzling complexion." The society of these cheerful guests gave a momentary impulse to the expiring energies of the aged peer, and for some days he appeared to be gaining strength. One morning he took Blanche to his private room, and unlocking an iron closet, shewed her the family jewels, which had been deposited there since the death of the late countess.

"There, my dear girl, are diamonds and other precious stones, and valuable trinkets, which once belonged to my poor, dear, departed wife, and into your keeping I now entrust them, for which purpose I wished to see you here and give them into your own hands; there is an inventory, my love, we must assure ourselves that none are missing, so lay them out on that table."

"Indeed, my Lord, I cannot accept your too munificent offer."

"And why not, my child?"

No answer was returned; but a deep blush overspread her face, suffusing her very brow, and her eyes were riveted on the ground.

"I know what is passing in your thoughts, my dear girl," added the Earl; "you are not yet Beauchamp's wife; but tell me truly, do you prefer another to him?"

"Oh! no, no, my Lord—all my hopes of happiness are centred in him alone; but perhaps he may—"

"What, my child? prefer another to you? Does he, did he ever love any other but yourself?"

"Indeed, I believe he never has, my Lord."

"Then rest assured, my dear child, he never can—for where would he find a second Blanch Douglas? so now do as I desire, and let us both compare the list with the contents."

"I will willingly assist you, my Lord, in that work, if you desire; but in my present position, I trust you will pardon me for maintaining my purpose, of declining to accept the family jewels."

"Well, child, I respect your delicacy, and will not press you further now, only assist me in my examination," which occupied them for some considerable time, the Earl noticing and commenting on the value of each ornament; and when all were found correct, and returned to the closet, the key was again offered to Blanche, who, with tears in her eyes, begged to be excused taking it.

"Indeed, my Lord, I feel your kindness more than I possibly can express, and it pains me to refuse you; but I cannot overcome my repugnance to presume on a situation which, by some unforeseen event, perhaps may never be my lot to fill."

"Well, well, child," said the Earl, rather im-

patiently, "you have disappointed me in the pleasure I anticipated; but your aunt Gordon will not refuse the trust I shall repose in her, and keep this key for you. So now give me your arm down stairs, but not another word, unless you would distress me more than you have done already."

With Beauchamp and the ladies' assistance, the Earl had been enabled to walk up and down stairs, and after breakfast was generally wheeled in his easy garden chair about the lawn, which was several acres in extent, reaching down to the lake, over whose silvery surface some favourite swans (one nearly his equal in age) asserted their dignified supremacy, holding the other wild fowl in terror of their sway. A servant carried a small basket filled with corn and bread, with which his pets were fed from the Earl's own hand, and with Blanche and Constance on either side, his morning was thus spent; whilst the old Squire, Malcolm, and Beauchamp rode about the country, visiting the farm houses belonging to the domain. The reaction from this temporary excitement was soon, however, apparent to all, and the poor old man, becoming exhausted by his

forced exertions, was, at the end of ten days after Blanche's arrival, obliged, from excessive weakness, to keep to his own apartment,which he was never again destined to leave ; Mrs. Gordon and Beauchamp sitting and reading to him, by turns, portions of scripture and religious books, from which he derived consolation and support.

The night in which he breathed his last, the aged Earl called the family to his bedside, and joining the hands of the two affianced couples together, invoked (like the patriarchs of olden times) a blessing on their heads. Taking then an affectionate and impressive leave of Mr. Beauchamp and Mrs. Gordon, he sank back on his pillow, exhausted of his last remaining strength, and continued in a state of stupor for some hours, William Beauchamp sitting by his bedside ; his name was once more uttered in a low tone, scarcely above a whisper.

"I am here, my dear Lord, do you want any thing? Pray take this cordial to revive you."

"No, my dear boy, I have done with the things of this world. Oh! what will be the *next ?*"

"A far more glorious one than this, where,

by God's mercy, we shall all meet again, never more to part."

"William," he whispered, "I almost despair of reaching that better world."

"Oh! my dear Lord," replied Beauchamp, in an impressive voice; "let not the Christian despair, who has God for his Father, Christ for his Saviour, and Heaven for his home."

A smile for a moment stole over the attenuated features of the dying peer—his hold on Beauchamp's hand relaxed, and he fell asleep, to wake no more in this world of sorrow.

CHAPTER X.

After the last sad rites had been paid to the deceased Earl, and his remains deposited in the family vault, Mrs. Gordon, with Constance, Blanche, and Malcolm, set out on their return to London; leaving Beauchamp and his father at the castle.

We must now take a retrospective view of what had been occurring in Town since their hasty departure, which, of course, being soon known, created no little curiosity in fashionable circles, as well as amongst Blanche's admirers, to ascertain the cause of their sudden flight. But Lady Malcolm, at her son's desire, would afford

no further information (neither would Fred Beauchamp) than that they had gone into the country for a few days, but would return again to Town shortly; with which all were obliged to rest contented.

As Mrs. Harcourt was sitting at breakfast one morning, scanning the column in the "Morning Post" appropriated to births, marriages, and deaths, to which her attention was always first directed, as customary with many of her sex, she exclaimed:—

"Goodness, Mr. Harcourt, wonders will never cease—only hear this:—

"At Annandale Castle, the Earl of Annandale, in his ninety-sixth year. He is succeeded in his title and vast estates by Mr. Beauchamp, of Bampton House (now seventh Earl of Annandale), who, with his son and daughter, have been staying at the Castle for some time."

"Impossible! this must be a hoax!"

"A hoax, my dear! Who do you think would put such a thing in print, unless it were true?"

"Oh, Selina Markham—just to annoy me."

"Pooh! nonsense!—but now Lady Malcolm's

mystery is explained—of her niece being attached to the heir of one of the richest earldoms in the kingdom—here he is—William Beauchamp—then Mrs. Gordon's departure with Constance and Blanche, following so soon after—why, the fact is, no doubt, they have all been staying at Annandale Castle."

"Well, I think it is unpardonable in Lady Malcolm and Mrs. Gordon keeping us in the dark so long."

"That is our own fault, my dear, for speaking so often in a derogatory tone of Mr. Beauchamp, who is a great favourite with both those ladies; and therefore they have kept the secret to themselves."

"Still, Mr. Harcourt, were he a Duke, instead of Lord Beauchamp, as I suppose he must now be called, he shall never have my consent to marry my niece."

"You need not trouble yourself, my dear, as your consent is not necessary."

"Then yours, as her guardian, is; and if you have the spirit of a mouse, which I sometimes doubt, you will not submit to be insulted and despised in this barefaced manner."

"I must be guided by circumstances, Mrs. Harcourt, and do not intend to follow your example, by losing my temper when there is no occasion for it. You appear to forget all about the trial, and are blind to the fact that Mrs. Gordon is joint guardian with myself to Miss Douglas. What would my opposition be now worth, with Lady Malcolm's influence thrown into the scale against me? Nothing, Mrs. Harcourt, literally worse than nothing! I should, in that case, be insulted and despised to my face, as you are pleased to say I have been already."

"Oh, I see. You wish to curry favour with the ruling powers; and the Earl of Annandale is, of course, a very different person to the old fox-hunting Squire of Bampton."

"Undoubtedly, my dear, he is, as a peer of the realm—and Lord Beauchamp is now entitled to demand the hand of Miss Douglas. In short, the Lord Chancellor, if appealed to on the subject, would, without hesitation, give his approval to the marriage."

"I hate those Beauchamps, Mr. Harcourt—the son particularly, who has occasioned us such disgrace in that trial; and I had rather have seen

Blanche Douglas Lord Vancourt's wife, bad as he was, than William Beauchamp's bride."

"You ought to be ashamed to express such feelings, whatever may be your secret thoughts, Mrs. Harcourt. Mr. Beauchamp behaved with great courage and forbearance throughout that unfortunate affair, and acted as I should myself."

"As you would, indeed—why, at the very sight of Lord Vancourt's pistol, you would have fallen into a fit."

"I shall not submit to your taunts a moment longer, madam," exclaimed her indignant husband, rising from his chair; "and if Lord Beauchamp were to become plain Mr. Beauchamp again to-morrow, he should marry my ward with my full consent;"—saying which, he left the room in a furious passion.

The day after Lord Malcolm's return to London, he met Mr. Harcourt at his own door, when walking through Brook Street.

"Ah, my Lord," exclaimed he, "I'm glad to see you in Town again—we wondered where you had all gone to."

"Only a little trip into the north, my dear

sir, which is the most delightful journey I ever made in my life; and something in your way, profitable, too."

"Oh, indeed, Malcolm—a little windfall—eh!"

"No, my dear sir, an uncommonly heavy one—what would you say to bagging two hundred thousand pounds?"

"Oh, you are joking, Malcolm—some of your usual fun, I suppose."

"Well, it is not a bad joke that my betrothed wife, now Lady Constance Beauchamp, has been left by the old peer just the sum I named—hard money in the funds."

"What! two hundred thousand pounds?"

"Yes, Mr. Harcourt, as certain as that you are standing in this street, with a few odds and ends besides. These were only his savings from the rents."

"Indeed, my dear Malcolm, I am rejoiced to hear of your good fortune. Then the present Earl, I conclude, has succeeded to something very considerable?"

"The rental, to my knowledge, exceeds fifty thousand a-year—so now, good morning, and pray give my compliments to Mrs. Harcourt

with this pleasing intelligence about the penniless, fox-hunting Beauchamp."

Nothing could exceed the surprise and delight of Lady Malcolm on learning from her son the magnificent bequest of the late earl.

"Why, my dear child, how lovely you must have appeared in his eyes."

"She was kind and affectionate to the dear old man," replied Mrs. Gordon, "as she ever is to all who deserve her love."

"And, my dear Blanche—was he fond of her?"

"As she was of him; and he has given her all the family jewels, which she persisted in refusing, until she became entitled to them—so these are under my care at present."

"Which," said Lady Malcolm, "I hope will not be long. Well, my dear children, I am overjoyed at your good fortune; and now our gaiety must cease for a time, which I shall not in the least regret."

Lord Malcolm, who had passed hitherto as a poor Scotch nobleman, about to commit great folly in marrying a country squire's daughter, failed not to acquaint two or three of his most

confidential friends with his intended wife's great accession of fortune, the news of which he knew would travel post haste through the clubs in London.

"Eh, demmit!" exclaimed the Captain, to Lord Henry Bayntun, as he was lounging at the club window in St. James's Street, "that fellow Malcolm has picked up one worth having, after all—just two hundred thousand yellow boys—'pon honour, what a prize!"

"What do you mean, Markham?" enquired Lord Henry.

"That Lady Constance, Will Beauchamp's sister, has had that sum left her by the late Earl of Annandale, and she is engaged to Malcolm."

"I'll bet you a pony it is all chaff," replied Lord Henry.

"Done, Bayntun—make it fifty, or a hundred, if you like."

"No, a pony will do; but how is the bet to be decided?"

"Doctors' Commons, old fellow—read the will—no mistake there."

Lord Ayrshire, although experiencing great

relief in the disappearance of Miss Douglas from the fashionable world after his rejection, could not suppress his curiosity, on meeting Lord Malcolm, to know the truth of the reports in circulation, and congratulated him on his good fortune. "You have kept things very close, Malcolm, between yourself and Miss Beauchamp, although I suspected how the case stood."

"You forget my warning in Tattersall's yard —that Miss Beauchamp was certainly bespoken, if not Miss Douglas also; but a 'wilfu' mon maun have his way,' as we say in Scotland, and had you followed my advice, you would have spared yourself the disagreeable necessity of being further enlightened on this matter."

"Oh, then, I suppose Mr. Harcourt has informed you what occurred in your absence?"

"No, Ayrshire, not a word has escaped Mr. Harcourt's lips, that I am aware of, on this subject; but Lady Malcolm has of course confided to me your proposal for my cousin, which you may feel assured will go no further."

"I thank you, Malcolm, for this kind consideration, as you know it would not be very agreeable to have this little affair going the

round of the clubs. But may I know to whom your too lovely cousin is engaged, for such I am told is the case?"

"You expect me to keep your secret, Ayrshire, and ask me at the same time to reveal another's; is this consistent?"

"No, my dear fellow, obviously not; but my reason for enquiring is, that were the thing not definitively arranged, I should be disposed to renew my suit to the young lady herself."

"And that would unquestionably be attended with the same result," added Lord Malcolm; which at once put a stop to further questions.

The second morning after this explanation, while Mr. Harcourt was busily engaged reading the debates in the House of Commons, the footman brought in a card, saying the gentleman was waiting in the hall.

"Mangle!" exclaimed Mr. Harcourt; "I don't know any such person — why did you admit him?"

"He stepped in before I could shut the door, sir," replied the man, "although I said you were not at home."

"Most extraordinary conduct," muttered Mr.

Harcourt, fussing and fuming with nervous trepidation; "but I suppose, my dear," turning to his wife, "I had better know what his business may be."

"Certainly, Mr. Harcourt, let him be shewn in here."

A tall, portly man made his appearance, who, with a low bow, apologized for calling at such an unfashionable hour, alleging important business as his excuse. "My name is Mangle, sir," addressing Mr. Harcourt.

"So I presume, sir, by your card," replied that gentleman, turning as white as his own table-cloth.

"Of the old established firm of Mangle, Smasher, and Nibble, of Lincoln's Inn Fields."

Mr. Harcourt acknowledged this unsolicited information by a bow only, looking as if the whole of the respectable firm were at him already, tooth and nail.

"I conclude I have the honour of addressing Mr. Harcourt," resumed the lawyer, with an ill-suppressed smile of contempt at the nervous twitchings about his opponent's mouth, betraying unmistakable signs of terror.

"Well, sir," exclaimed Mrs. Harcourt, unable any longer to contain her indignation at her husband's pusillanimity, "and if he is Mr. Harcourt, what is your business with him? that I will thank you to explain as concisely as possible, sir."

"Mr. Harcourt is Miss Douglas's guardian, madam, I believe."

"Well, sir, what next?"

"Miss Douglas's father had an only brother, Archibald Douglas, who went out to India, and died there some years ago."

"Well, sir, that is no news to us."

"Very likely, Madam; but I suppose it *is* news to you that he left an only son, who has just arrived in this country?"

"And is an illegitimate child, Mr. Mangle, which perhaps may be news to you, as Mr. Archibald Douglas was not legally married to the mother of his children until after the birth of his last child, which was a daughter—in short, sir, he never had a son."

"On that point, madam, I must beg to differ with you, as we have evidence to prove his marriage before the birth of his last child, and

that child, madam, is Mr. Archibald Douglas, by whom we are instructed to take proceedings for the recovery of that property, to which, as male heir under the entail, he is most certainly entitled."

"Even were there such a person in existence, as you represent this gentleman to be," replied Mr. Harcourt, now gaining courage, "the property was entailed both in the male and female line to the descendants of the elder branch of the family, and therefore my niece is undoubtedly heiress at law, as the only child of Mr. Cameron Douglas."

"I think, sir, we shall be able to show that the deed of entail was not properly registered according to Scotch law, and is therefore invalid. But my present object, sir, in calling upon you, is to state that we have directed our agent in Scotland to serve notices on the tenants of the property, not to pay any more rents to yourself or any person on behalf of Miss Douglas; but as our client does not wish to press heavily on his cousin, I am further instructed to say, that if, on producing the evidence requisite to establish his claim, immediate possession of the

estates is surrendered, he will forego his right to the reimbursement of the rents and profits received by you for her use since her father's decease."

"Very well, sir," replied Mr. Harcourt, writing his solicitors' address on a card; "these are the names of my legal advisers, to whom I must refer you for any further communication on this most extraordinary business;" saying which, Mr. Mangle, with a stiff bow, made his exit.

CHAPTER XI.

"A PLEASANT piece of intelligence, truly," exclaimed Mrs. Harcourt, when the door closed; "so we are to refund all the money we have received on account of that wilful, perverse girl, who would have married Lord Danby and been off our hands by this time, if you had exercised your authority as her guardian ought to have done, and not given way to her ridiculous fancies about love and such nonsense."

"You know very well, Mrs. Harcourt, I could not compel her to marry against her inclination; but as she is now under Mrs. Gordon's pro-

tection, I shall resign my guardianship in favour of that lady; that is, in the event of this young man establishing his claim to the property, or producing any documents likely to prove it; that is the course, my dear, I shall adopt."

"And a very wise one too, Mr. Harcourt, and the sooner that is done the better."

"Well, my dear, I will order the carriage directly—go first into the city to see my solicitors, and prepare them for a visit from this Mr. Mangles, and then call in Grosvenor Square, to apprise Lady Malcolm and Mrs. Gordon of what has occurred."

The consternation of these two ladies, when informed by Mr. Harcourt that a claimant had arisen to dispute their niece's right to her father's property, may be imagined. They sat in mute astonishment and dismay, as that gentleman proceeded in his narrative; when, at its close, Mrs. Gordon exclaimed, "It is all a trick, Mr. Harcourt, a vile imposition, as my brother was never married to that woman until a few weeks previous to his death, and his youngest child, a daughter, was then two years old."

"But how can you prove this, Mrs. Gordon?—that is the question."

"By the servant who lived with him at the time, as nurse to his children, and afterwards returned to this country with the woman he had made his wife."

"And where is she to be found, Mrs. Gordon?"

"Somewhere in Scotland; but where I cannot tell, although two years ago she wrote to me for money, which I sent to the address she gave me—Janet Maclean, Stranraer."

"Then, Mrs. Gordon, it is necessary to ascertain without delay if this Janet Maclean still lives, and her place of abode, as she will be a most important witness, and on her evidence our chief dependence rests. If we can establish the fact that no child was born in wedlock, it is quite clear the man who calls himself Archibald Douglas is an impostor; but no time must be lost, as these solicitors, who have taken up this case, are notorious for being the greatest sharpers in London, and will cause an immensity of trouble."

After Mr. Harcourt's departure, Lord Mal-

colm returned from his usual ride with Blanche and Constance, and when told of Mr. Harcourt's revelations, his rage could scarcely be kept within bounds. "What!" he exclaimed, "be frightened by such an infamous trick as this? Where has been this Mr. Archibald Douglas for these last ten years? Since the death of Blanche's father, I am not to be gulled or terrified, like that craven-hearted Harcourt, by such a trumped-up improbable tale."

"It is, however, Charles, a serious business," replied Mrs. Gordon, "and we must prepare to meet the claim set up by these people, without delay or hesitation."

"That shall be done forthwith, aunt. I will go directly to my little ferret of a Scotch lawyer, in Gray's Inn, Macvittie, who is as sharp as a needle, and canny as a true Scot. Harcourt's solicitors are quiet, respectable men of business, with good country connection, but too slow for such a case as this; so I will send Macvittie to help them, and sift these villainous pretensions to the smallest grain of evidence that can be produced."

"Poor Blanche was so bewildered at first

by this overwhelming intelligence, that she sat motionless in her chair, speechless and stunned by the heavy blow that had fallen so suddenly upon her, which her aunt Gordon observing, led her away to her own room, on entering which she burst into tears.

"Oh! aunt, aunt," she exclaimed, "I am now, perhaps, a penniless orphan, dependent on your kind bounty, and as such can never become William's wife."

"My dear child, do not, I entreat you, give way to such dreadful anticipations, which I trust in heaven will never be realised; one at least never can, that, whether rich or poor, you will ever find any change in the affections of William Beauchamp."

"But, dear aunt, my first impulse is to release him from his engagement, which was formed under such different circumstances, that it ought and must now be cancelled."

"You are too hasty, my dear Blanche, in taking the claim so impudently advanced by these unprincipled people as a just and legal one; pray do nothing hastily, and promise me not to offer such an insult to William Beau-

champ's love and high sense of honour, as you propose. We shall have the lawyer's opinion in a few days, and it will then be time enough to determine how we ought to act."

The next day, Mr. Mangle, having made an appointment with Mr. Harcourt's solicitors, which Macvittie attended, produced the alleged marriage certificate of Archibald Douglas and Susan Monkton, which Messrs. Boram and Teagle having carefully scanned, pronounced to be apparently an authentic document.

"So far then, so good," chuckled Mr. Mangles, "and we shall be prepared to prove by Mrs. Archibald Douglas, and other witnesses, the birth of a son, ten months after the date of this certificate, which I conclude will be quite sufficient to establish our claim."

"Not quite, I think," observed Mr. Teagle; "there are some other points to be considered."

"Pray may I be permitted to have a look at that little document?" enquired Macvittie, in the most insinuating manner.

"On whose behalf, sir?" demanded Mr. Mangle.

"Lord Malcolm, sir; Miss Douglas's cousin, who is interested in the family property, failing Miss Douglas."

"Oh, certainly," replied Mr. Mangle, "although I do not trust it out of my own hands."

"I do not covet it, my dear sir," replied Macvittie, adjusting his spectacles on his nose with great deliberation; "pray keep it in your own hand, which will do very well—just a trifle more to the light, my dear sir, as my eye-sight is rather dim. Thank you, that will do."

"Well, sir," asked Mr. Mangle, "you are also, I conclude, quite satisfied?"

"Yes, my dear sir, perfectly, that the little piece of paper in your hand is not worth a straw."

The countenance of Mangle at this sudden announcement underwent a change, which the keen eye of Macvittie instantly detected. "Ah, my dear sir, very prettily executed, but—"

"What?" demanded Mr. Mangle, impetuously thrusting the paper into his side pocket.

"I do not attach any very great importance to your case, Mr. Mangle, that is all."

"Will you state your objections, then?"

"No, Mr. Mangle, I must decline doing so at present."

"Very well, gentlemen, then I must wish you good morning, and we shall at once proceed to trial."

On Mr. Mangle's departure, Teagle asked, "What flaw did you see in that paper, Macvittie?—I could detect none whatever."

"The figure 5 has been altered into 3—and I am quite satisfied by the change in his face, Mangle knows it. Yet it is so cleverly done, that not one man in a hundred would notice the very slight, almost imperceptible to the naked eye, difference in the colour of the ink."

"This after all is a very slender thread to build a frame-work upon," remarked Borum; "and if they bring forward witnesses to prove the marriage, and the birth of a son as well, we are done for."

"Ay, *if* they do," replied Macvittie, "that little word if will decide the case; but my impression is, they will not get over that alteration in the figure."

Scarcely had Macvittie turned the corner of Broad Street, in the city, where Borum and

Teagle occupied spacious offices, than Mr. Harcourt drew up in his carriage, and was immediately shewn into Mr. Borum's private room.

"Well, my good sir," began the lawyer, "we have had an interview with Mr. Mangle, who produces a marriage certificate, which Lord Malcolm's solicitor thinks has been tampered with, and altered in the date, although neither Mr. Teagle nor myself could discover any difference in the ink, or an erasure of any kind."

"Then, what is your opinion, Mr. Borum?"

"Rather doubtful, my good sir, and if they bring forward witnesses to prove the birth of a son, establishing his identity with this young man, we shall be out of court directly; still there is the point to be decided, whether Miss Douglas, under the entail, takes precedence of a male heir in the second branch of the family, or not."

"Do you advise me then, Mr. Borum, to resign my guardianship at once to Mrs. Gordon?"

"That cannot help you, my good sir, as you are already liable for all rents received, as the acting guardian."

"Then I shall throw it into Chancery."

"Worse and worse, my good sir; that would be leaping from the frying pan into the fire—expenses frightful, last for years perhaps, and still you might be held accountable for all the money you have received since the death of Miss Douglas's father."

"Compromise with these people, then?" suggested Mr. Harcourt, almost in despair.

"If Mrs. Gordon will consent to such a proposition, no doubt, my good sir, a compromise may be effected on very advantageous terms; Mangle and Co. are needy men, having very likely taken up this on speculation, and think one bird in the hand is worth two in the bush. Still, my dear sir, we must not show the white feather too soon; they have great difficulties in their way, and we must maintain a bold front; Mr. Macvittie also is a clever, shrewd little man, and declares he will ferret out all their witnesses; so that, my good sir, we had better rest on our oars a little, and see what will turn up."

With this very unsatisfactory answer, Mr. Harcourt quitted Broad Street, perplexed and irresolute how to act; but before reaching Grosvenor Square, he had come to the conclusion

that a compromise was the only thing to save money, and this he resolved to press on Mrs. Gordon and Lady Malcolm by every argument in his power. Finding both ladies at home, he gave the most unfavourable account of the interview with his lawyer, who, he said, strongly advised a compromise. "Only think, my dear Madam," addressing Mrs. Gordon, "of our having to make good all the money expended on your niece's account, for which we are jointly liable."

"Excuse me, Mr. Harcourt, *you* only can be responsible for the appropriation of the rents, which you alone have received, without consulting me in any matter whatever relating to the property; but surely the expenditure has not exceeded one third of the incomings?"

"You forget, Mrs. Gordon, we have taken a house in town, for the benefit of the best masters, several seasons in succession, which we should not have done on our own account—have kept extra horses and servants for her use, with an expensive governess also, who had a carriage at her command; not to mention dress and other necessary items. Then the outlay for

repairs and draining on the property, with the agent's salary, has amounted to a large sum annually. But I shall be ready to give an account of my stewardship when required; the point for our present consideration is, whether we should not attempt to make terms with our opponents, before we are forced into a court of law, where all may be lost."

"We ought first, Mr. Harcourt, to have the opinion of the best counsel, before making any overtures, and be guided by their advice. Lord Malcolm is gone to consult with his solicitor on these matters at my request, and I hope the case is not quite so desperate as you imagine."

"Well, my dear Madam," said Mr. Harcourt, rising, "I shall be glad to know as soon as possible how you decide to act, although I anticipate almost certain defeat."

CHAPTER XII.

Blanche, who had been present during the latter part of this controversy, after Mr. Harcourt had left, retired to her own room, and locking her door, sat down and wrote a few hurried lines to Beauchamp, acquainting him with what had occurred, and releasing him from his engagement to herself.

She had just sealed the letter, and given it to her maid to post, herself, when Mrs. Gordon entered her room, telling her that Malcolm had returned with a very different story to Mr. Harcourt's, and wished to see her in the drawing-room; "so dry your tears, for, my dearest child,

depend upon it, Mr. Harcourt has only been frightening us to serve his own purpose, in dread of having to refund all the money he has received."

Malcolm having repeated the conversation he had with Macvittie, and his opinion of the marriage certificate, turning to Blanche, said, "Now, my dear girl, I think Beauchamp will be offended if I do not write him all particulars, as in your present position he ought to be consulted as to our future proceedings."

"Our position is now so completely altered, dear Charles," replied Blanche, bursting into tears, "that I have already released him from his engagement, which I felt bound in honour to do."

"And when, my dear girl, did you write to tell Will Beauchamp that Blanche Douglas was no longer worthy of his love, because a rascally impostor had claimed her property?"

"This afternoon, Charles."

"Is the letter posted, my sensitive little cousin?"

"Yes, I gave it to Alice, to post herself."

"Well, my love, then you have saved me the

trouble of using pen and ink; for if Beauchamp, on the receipt of that little billet doux, does not post up to London as fast as four horses can convey him, without stopping day or night, then, my love, I know nothing of his true character. I only trust he may not be thrown over by too much haste, and meet with some accident. Oh, Blanche, Blanche, how could you think so meanly of your noble-minded lover? Would you have released him, had he been so unfortunate as to lose all *his* property? Could *you* have ceased to love him?"

"Oh no, Charles—never; but as Lord Beauchamp, he will be expected to marry his equal in rank, at least not a portionless girl like myself."

"Stuff and nonsense, Blanche! you are not a portionless girl, and never shall be, if I can prevent it, even if that old croaker Harcourt's prognostications are verified; as Constance and myself have resolved to place a hundred thousand pounds at your disposal, over which no person shall have any control but yourself."

"Indeed, Charles, although most grateful for yours and dear Constance's kindness, it would

degrade me in my own eyes to be the recipient of another's bounty, on which I have no claim."

"My dear girl, do not talk so inconsistently. Constance had no greater claim by affinity on the old peer than you have on me—not so great, and yet we do not feel degraded by accepting his legacy; what is the use of relations, if they do not love and help each other? They are bound to do so, my dear girl, by the law of God and the law of Nature; and you can no more turn me and Constance from our purpose, than you can turn this house upside down with those little hands. I have teased and tormented you, dear Blanche, in prosperity, and it is now my duty to comfort and support you in adversity; and if you should lose your patrimony, of which, in my opinion, there is not the least chance, Beauchamp shall not receive in my cousin a portionless bride; not another word of remonstrance, Blanche—(as she was again beginning to decline his offer)—if you love me; you know my obstinate disposition, and in this I will have my way."

"But, my dear Charles——"

"But, my dear Blanche, I must now wish

you good morning, and mind you don't fret any more;" and Malcolm, taking up his hat, left the room.

Notwithstanding the remonstrances of Mrs. Gordon, and entreaties of Constance, Blanche could not be prevailed on to accept her cousin's generous offer, and her aunt, forbearing to harass her further on this painful subject, concluded the conversation by expressing her hopes that she might not be placed under the necessity of offending her cousin by a refusal. "The contingency will not, I trust, ever arrive, my dear girl; and, in the mean time, pray raise no further objection to Charles."

There was another point upon which she was equally resolved to break off her engagement with Beauchamp, and she implored her aunt to spare her the agony of an interview with him, should he arrive in London. Four days had now passed, Blanche, from distress of mind and excessive agitation, became restless and nervous to an alarming degree; she could scarcely be prevailed upon to touch anything either at breakfast or dinner, she would see no one but her immediate relations, and sat for hours to-

gether in her own room, in dread of Beauchamp's arrival. "Oh, dear aunt," she exclaimed on the fourth evening, "why does he not come? what can have detained him? Oh, how I wish your sad interview with him was over—I shall feel more resigned when that is past; I shall indeed, aunt."

"I fear not, my poor child, and dread your sinking into hopeless despondency; and he, poor fellow! what misery awaits him!"

At this moment, a loud knock at the door reverberated through the hall, on which Blanche sprang from her chair: "Oh, aunt, he is come, that is his knock; pray, be quick, and return to me as soon as possible."

Mrs. Gordon descended to the drawing-room, where, pale and haggard, stood Beauchamp, talking to Lady Malcolm and his sister. At her entrance he turned quickly round, and grasping her hand, enquired hastily, "Where is Blanche?"

"In her own room, dear William, and I am sorry to say, so very unwell that I fear you cannot see her."

"Then if not now, I can see her to-morrow morning."

Mrs. Gordon was silent.

"Does she refuse to see me at all then?" he exclaimed, in amazement.

"It is even so, dear William; but come with me into the other room, and I will tell you what I am commissioned to say."

In vain Mrs. Gordon urged all her niece's arguments to avoid an interview which would be so painful to both; in vain she spoke of their altered position, and Blanche's resolution to break off her engagement, unless she was restored to her rightful inheritance.

Beauchamp paced up and down the room, in a state of mind bordering on distraction, for some few moments, then confronting Mrs. Gordon, said, in a firm tone, "Cease, cease, dear aunt, this mockery of my woe, and go tell Blanche Douglas from me, that I will not quit this roof until I have a refusal from her own lips—see her, I must and will, this very night."

Mrs. Gordon still attempting to dissuade him from his purpose, he frantically exclaimed: "Go, dear aunt, this moment, and tell Blanche, if she will not see me now, we shall never in this world meet again."

"Well, then, if I bring her down with me, promise to be more calm, for she is in a dreadfully nervous state."

"Yes, aunt, I will be calm; but, mind, see her I will once more."

Mrs. Gordon having explained the state in which she had left her lover, and telling Blanche what she dreaded from his words, prevailed on her to see him, and she entered the room in which he was still pacing to and fro, leaning on her aunt's arm, trembling and almost fainting from agitation and exhaustion.

Beauchamp advanced to meet her, and seeing her almost sinking, caught her in his arms, saying, "Come, dear Blanche, come to my heart once more, even if it be for the last time;" and she fell nearly senseless on his breast, sobbing convulsively.

"Hush! hush, my own dear girl," he murmured; "still that beating heart—you are mine once more—mine now and for ever."

"Oh, no, dear William, it cannot be—pray release me."

"No, Blanche, never until you promise to become my wife, or you will never see me alive

again ; my arm shall hold you till you tear it from your side—so now, my love, let me lead you to the sofa, and listen calmly to what I have to say. Do you see that ring on my finger, dear girl, placed there by your own hand, with the vow that by that symbol you would be mine for ever."

"Yes, William, I remember it well—the past is a happy dream, the present a sad reality. I never thought then how different our positions might become ; but still my vow remains unaltered—I will never marry another."

"To that I cannot, will not hold you, dear Blanche ; take the ring from my finger, and take with it all my hopes of earthly happiness."

"That I cannot do, William."

"Then listen to reason, Blanche ; at least, you ought to be consistent. When you placed that ring upon my finger, you were a rich heiress, and I (by Mrs. Harcourt's account) a poor, penniless fox-hunter ; you would have married me then, could I have obtained your guardian's consent."

"Yes, William, indeed I would."

"And should I have been degraded in your

eyes by accepting your hand, although then represented to you without fortune?"

"Oh, no, dearest William, nothing could ever degrade you in my sight."

"Our positions now, dear girl, are apparently, but not really reversed, and Blanche Douglas is too proud to make that concession she expected of William Beauchamp. Yes, that is the fact. I might and must have been humbled then in your opinion, and now your false sense of honour would trample all my feelings and fondly cherished expectations in the dust."

"No, William, the time may arrive when I will no longer oppose your wishes; but should all be lost to me, I shall ever love and esteem you as my own dear brother."

"Will nothing change your purpose, Blanche? Will no feeling of compassion or compunction induce you to avert my doom?"

"Do not urge me further, dear William, in pity to my agony of mind and dreadful sufferings these last few days. Oh, spare me the misery of listening to your reproaches, which, believe me, I do not deserve—we may meet again as before—as brother and sister."

"Never, Blanche, that time is past. Now hear the sentence you have pronounced; if we part now, we never meet again, for I will leave my native land, and return to it no more, unless this night you promise to be mine."

"Oh, William, recall that rash vow, think of your poor father, who would be broken-hearted if you left him; think of your sister and dear aunt Gordon."

"It is too late, Blanche; I have sworn to do so, and will keep my oath. You have forced me in despair to utter these hasty words; your false pride will entail this misery on us all."

It was now Blanche's turn to beg and implore her lover to alter his determination; but her voice fell unheeded on his ear, and leaning his head on his hand, he seemed lost in thought, and deaf to her entreaties.

"Oh, William," she exclaimed, "why will you not speak to me? only say you will not go."

"Go,—yes, I know I must go," he muttered, without regarding her; "Blanche Douglas sends me forth an outcast from my home, to die among strangers, scorned, despised, and neglected by

her, for whom I would have sacrificed a hundred lives, had I them to give. Let me go," he cried, springing wildly from his seat, as she attempted to hold his hand. "I am crazed, maddened!" and seizing his hat, he was rushing from the room like one distracted, when Blanche threw herself in his way, and casting her arms round his neck, cried, "In mercy, speak to me, my own dear William—I am yours, now and for ever. Oh, say you will not leave me!"

At that appeal his pent-up feelings gave way, and as his tears fell on her neck, he murmured, "Oh! Blanche, Blanche, you have nearly killed me!"

"Forgive me, dear William, this once," she whispered, "I will never cause you another moment's pain;" and feeling him totter under her weight, she led him to the sofa, where he fell back exhausted on the cushion. She was kneeling by his side, fruitlessly endeavouring to rouse him from his stupor, when Mrs. Gordon entered. "Oh, aunt, aunt! I have killed him by my folly—what can I do?"

"Run, my love, for a glass of wine, he has only fainted from over-exhaustion, poor fellow,

having travelled day and night since your letter reached him."

Blanche rushed down stairs into the dining-room, and seizing a decanter and glass from table, flew like a fairy to her lover's rescue, who had begun to recover consciousness from Mrs. Gordon's application of salts. Blanche, trembling and shaking, poured half the bottle over her aunt's dress, then too intent on Beauchamp to notice it; and having succeeded in making him swallow half a glass of wine, she continued bathing his forehead with Eau de Cologne, until he revived and tried to sit up.

"No, my dear boy, rest as you are a while longer, and drink some more wine—and there, I declare, that naughty child has spoilt my new dress—well, Blanche, to punish you, you must take my place now by William's side; but mind he does not move until I return."

Blanche silently placed her hand in his, and Beauchamp, knowing what that implied, asked:

"Is that mine, Blanche, without conditions of any kind?"

"Yes, my own dear William—your very own."

"Then give me a kiss to confirm your promise."

Leaning over him, she said:—

"Will you forgive me?"

His reply was given by another warm embrace, when Mrs. Gordon appeared.

"Ah! William, you do not want me now, I suppose; but I will have no more scenes to-night—and here is Charles come to see you."

"Ah! my dear fellow," exclaimed Malcolm, taking his hand; "so Blanche has thrown you over at last—a regular back-fall. I thought how it would end with her ridiculous notions. She won't be satisfied, I suppose, till she has killed you outright—but how do you feel now, old fellow?"

"Much better, Malcolm, thank you, since taking that glass of wine."

"Then just take another, Beauchamp—or stay—a glass of brandy and water will do you more service, with a couple of biscuits. You are overdone—that's the fact; and, I dare say,

have stopped neither to eat nor drink on the road since you left the Castle."

"That is true enough, Malcolm."

"Ay, ay, there it is—starving, fretting, and travelling, without rest for two days, are quite enough to derange any fellow's digestive organs; and this backhanded blow from Blanche knocked you clean off your legs, old fellow. Well, my dear, obstinate, little cousin, it is lucky he is no worse—but don't try this game again, or you will have him in an apoplectic fit, my love, and that will be beyond our remedies. It's all your doing, Blanche, worrying, vexing, and tormenting him and yourself about these confounded rascals—why, what on earth is the difference between you—even if you had lost your money (which you won't—a shilling of it). When you were rich, you would have married him; and now he is rich, he would marry you. If Con had acted in this foolhardy manner, I should have thought her cracked; and I verily believe, all this confounded business has turned your head, my dear girl; and that you will be in a raging fever before to-morrow morning."

"Oh, Charles, pray spare me—I will never vex him again."

"That's right, my dear. Keep to that resolution, and all will be well—and now, give Beauchamp his glass of brandy and water, and make him eat a biscuit also."

CHAPTER XIII.

MALCOLM's anticipations were realised about his cousin,—who was in a burning fever all night; and towards morning becoming delirious, the family physician was sent for by Mrs. Gordon, who, with Constance, remained by her bedside, listening with tearful eyes to her ravings about her lover. Mrs. Gordon explained to the doctor what had occurred, as far as she deemed necessary, who prescribed the usual remedies in such cases, desiring she might be kept perfectly quiet, and no other person admitted to her room.

"But stay, my dear madam," as he was leaving, "if she should particularly desire to

see Lord Beauchamp on regaining consciousness, let him be sent for directly, as his presence will go far to allay this feverish excitement."

After taking the medicine, Blanche fell into a fitful doze for two hours, from which, awaking with a sudden start, she exclaimed :—

"Oh, aunt, he is gone—gone for ever—I sent him away, never to return."

"No, my love, he is not gone—you have been wandering—he is still here, in this house."

"Oh, no, dear aunt—do not deceive me, I know he is gone."

"Then, my dear, promise to be calm and not speak, and you shall see him directly. Constance, will you call your brother ?"

In a few seconds, Beauchamp was kneeling by her bedside, with her hand in his.

"You will not leave me, dear William," she murmured, "as you said you would—oh, promise me not to go."

"On my word of honour, my own dearest girl, I will never leave you more—but you must not talk now—so try to compose yourself, and remember I am always within call, if you want me."

"Oh, don't go, William," she still whispered.

"Keep my hand in yours, then, dear child, and I will sit by your bedside, if you will try to sleep—but you must not speak, or I will leave you."

Assured now of his presence, which calmed and soothed her troubled brain, she soon relapsed into a sound and refreshing sleep. Beauchamp sat gazing on her flushed face, and felt her burning hand and throbbing pulse. The tears chased each other down his cheek; and sinking noiselessly on his knees, he prayed long and fervently that God would be pleased to spare her life. "Hear me, oh! Father of all mercies —hear me," he murmured, "and, of thy infinite goodness, grant that this dear child may be restored to me again!" when, overcome by emotion, and the excitement and fatigue of the last two days, with his face resting on the bed, he fell fast asleep by her he loved so dearly, his hand still firmly locked in hers.

Mrs. Gordon, who had been watching Beauchamp's actions, cautiously approached, and hearing his heavy breathing, whispered Constance:—"Dear William has fallen asleep in that kneeling posture."

"Oh, let him alone, aunt; he is quite worn out, poor fellow, in mind and body."

For three hours, neither Blanche nor Beauchamp stirred, when Alice softly entered the room, whispering the doctor was coming up stairs. Mrs. Gordon met him at the door, and placing her finger on her lips, in token of silence, pointed to the bed. The doctor crept on tiptoe to listen to his patient's breathing, and as noiselessly retreating, beckoned Mrs. Gordon out of the room. "That will do, my dear madam, better than all my medicine; pray don't disturb them."

Blanche was the first to awake, with all her faculties restored, and great was her astonishment on finding her lover's head resting by her side, in perfect unconsciousness. "Oh, aunt," was her sudden exclamation; "where am I?"

"In your own bed, my dear, but as you would have William's hand in yours, he has fallen asleep too, and, thank goodness, you have both slept soundly for these last three hours; so now, my love, if you will let him go, it is time you had a cup of tea, and he will not be sorry to have some breakfast."

From this time her fever began to abate, and in three days Blanche made her appearance once more in the drawing-room, and Beauchamp, thinking the present a most favourable opportunity for making his proposals for her hand, obtained her consent to apply to her guardian for his formal approval of their marriage. "Out of evil good often proceeds, dear Blanche," he observed, "and Mr. Harcourt may be induced now to give his consent, which, under different circumstances, he would have refused; for I believe he is so worried by the thought of being called on to refund the rents, that he will be too happy to shift any further responsibility off his own shoulders on to mine, or any man of substance you might select; and as you have promised never to turn restive again, you will, I trust, my own dearest Blanche, no longer hesitate to invest me with the title to defend your rights and protect you from all further annoyances. In me you shall ever find a true friend and brother, as well as husband, and all my energies shall be directed to promote your happiness."

"That, dear William, I can never doubt; and

I quite agree with you that the present is a propitious time to obtain Mr. Harcourt's consent."

We must now relate what was passing elsewhere. The news of Miss Douglas's loss of fortune sped with the rapidity ill news is ever wont to travel. Lord Henry Bayntun having ascertained the fact from Mr. Mangle, whom he had been consulting on some little affair of his own, and meeting Lord Ayrshire at his club, all the particulars were communicated to the Marquis, at the conclusion of which recital, Lord Henry observed, "A deuced lucky escape for you, Ayrshire."

"What do you allude to, Bayntun?"

"Oh, Danby thinks the heiress threw you over."

"Danby had better attend to his own affairs, Bayntun, and not meddle with other men's concerns; because *he* has been overturned, as you call it, I suppose he wishes to make it appear that I have had no better success; but who is his authority? That I shall expect to know, not choosing my name to go the round of all the clubs as a rejected man."

"Tut! tut! Ayrshire, don't flare up in that

fashion, Danby merely expressed that as his opinion; for he said he had tried to ascertain whether you had proposed or not, from Malcolm, who refused to give him any information; so it is merely conjecture on his part."

"Very likely, Bayntun; but I shall be obliged by your telling him, with my compliments, to keep his conjectures to himself for the future. You know, when I set my mind on buying a horse, price will not stop me; and if I should bid for a woman, the chances are in my favour, I think,—eh, Bayntun?"

"Oh, of course, we all know that your rent-roll is as long as this room; but you would not marry a girl without any fortune at all, would you?"

"That would make no difference to me, if, in all other respects, she comes up to my standard."

"Oh, very well; then I conclude the heiress may be had now for asking, as Mangle tells me old Harcourt is in a proper funk about refunding all the money he has received."

This last piece of information suggested an idea to the Marquis, who, taking his hat, wished Lord Henry good morning. With all his

refinement of manners and agreeable conversation, Lord Ayrshire possessed a proud, haughty temper, and he could ill endure being foiled in anything he undertook, or being outdone or outbid by any other man. If he had set his mind on purchasing a horse at Tattersall's, every one was aware, who knew him, that it was mere waste of time to bid against him. Yet he was, from this peculiarity of temper, most wofully imposed upon, and horses were run up to three or four times their value by some of the knowing ones, just, as Lord Henry said, "to make him open his mouth." There was a manifest impatience in his mode of advancing against any other competitor, which at once betrayed this impatience of temper, as if no other man had a right to make an offer for the animal on which the Marquis of Ayrshire had once set his affections. One day, a remarkably fine, well-bred brougham horse was brought to the hammer, which immediately catching his Lordship's eye, he enquired his age.

"Six years old, my Lord," replied Mr. Tattersall; "high stepper—nearly thorough bred—what shall I say, my Lord? a hundred? thank

you, my Lord—trot him down—take care, gentlemen. One hundred guineas are offered for that splendid animal—and ten—thank you, sir; a hundred and ten guineas."

"Make it fefty* at once, gentlemen."

"Thank you, my Lord—one hundred and fefty guineas are bid; will any gentleman advance on that sum?"

"Twenty," from a voice near.

"One hundred and seventy are offered—going at that figure."

"Two hundred," exclaimed Lord Ayrshire."

"Thank you, my Lord. Two hundred guineas are bid—going at that price—going, gentlemen, for two hundred guineas—will nobody advance?—for the last time, going at two hundred guineas"—a pause for a moment, and the hammer fell.

"Well, Ayrshire, exclaimed Lord Henry, "you would have that *dark* bay, notwithstanding my hints not to buy him."

"I call him a *light* bay horse, Bayntun."

"Very likely, doctors differ; but I'll bet a pony, notwithstanding, he is a *dark* bay."

* The old Mr. Tattersall always pronounced it so.

"How so, Bayntun? you want your spectacles this morning."

"More likely you want yours, Ayrshire, for the horse you have just bought is as blind as a bat, or will be so very shortly."

"I don't care if he is," replied the Marquis, impatiently; "having resolved that fellow who bid against me should not have him, for his insolence in running him up."

"Hah, hah, hah!" laughed Lord Henry, "done, my Lord, done brown, as well as bay; that was only a puffer."

This little anecdote will suffice to show the animus by which the Marquis was actuated, when any one or any thing ran counter to his determination. We must now follow him from the club-house, after his conversation with Lord Henry Bayntun, and reveal what was passing in his mind, as he took his way direct to Upper Brook Street. His thoughts were bent on redeeming the prestige he had lost by being set down as a rejected man, and knowing Mr. Harcourt's weak points, he resolved to re-open the negociation about his ward. "It is not the question whether her affections are wholly mine

or not," he muttered, as he rode along; "that with me is now quite a secondary consideration; but having committed the error of proposing, and rendered myself conspicuous by paying her more attention than I ever did any other woman, she shall be mine at any cost, if possible, and when once my wife, she may repent her waywardness in declining my first overtures."

As drowning men will catch at straws, so Mr. Harcourt caught at Lord Ayrshire's proposition, to bear the brunt of the trial, and make good any deficiencies that could be legally claimed, on the condition that he obtained the consent of his ward to become Lord Ayrshire's wife. "I do not believe," replied that worthy gentleman, "your lordship will incur much risk, as counsel's opinion is decidedly in our favour, and possession is nine points of the law. But if you are really serious in the matter, and choose to take the lady with her liabilities and rights, as they stand, I will use all my influence with Lady Malcolm and Mrs. Gordon to effect your object, although I fear there may be still one obstacle in our way."

"And what is that, my dear sir?"

"The same that I mentioned before—some prior attachment."

"That I do not think of much moment now, as I believe few men, if any, would marry Miss Douglas under her present circumstances. Why, my dear sir, it would ruin any man of moderate fortune, if her cause were lost. But to save my credit in the fashionable world, I will take my chance, as I never can endure to be beaten, Mr. Harcourt, and cost what it may, I am resolved to marry your ward, now that I have gone so far."

"Very well, my Lord, then I think a little memorandum may be as well drawn up between us, just a few lines."

"Oh, certainly, my dear sir; pray write down what you think necessary, and I will sign the paper."

Mr. Harcourt, being what is called a shrewd man of business (which means, in plain language, one who will take advantage of any weakness or blindness in his neighbour to drive a good bargain for himself), took care so to word this little document, that all responsibilities, past, present, and to come, incurred by himself, and

the refunding of all rents received since her father's death, on his ward's account, should devolve on Lord Ayrshire's shoulders.

The Marquis having hastily scanned the contents, signed the paper, and rising, said, "Now, my dear sir, I rely entirely on your honour to keep this arrangement a profound secret."

"Of course, my Lord; on my own account only I should never mention it, or our plans would at once be defeated."

Mr. Harcourt had just carefully deposited this little document in his writing-desk, when the servant entered with Lord Beauchamp's card, saying his lordship wished to see him a few minutes alone.

"Show Lord Beauchamp into my private room," was the reply; and in a few moments Beauchamp was receiving the warm congratulations of his *soi-disant* friend, which were estimated at their full value. Circumlocution or evasion being equally distasteful to Beauchamp's mind, the purport of his visit was soon explained, and his intention avowed, of settling the whole of Blanche's fortune on herself, as well as a very handsome addition from his own.

"In fact, Mr. Harcourt, you must be aware that I am actuated by no *mercenary motives now*, in asking for the hand of your ward."

"Oh, quite so, my dear Beauchamp; but how long is it, may I ask, that you have been so attached to Blanche? a long time, I suspect, Beauchamp, eh? or at least she has, I think, been to you."

"Then, dear sir, there is a greater prospect of our being happy together."

"Well, my young friend, I have no objection to yourself; but there are grave objections in your way. This suit, which may deprive her of all her property, and then the responsibilities you would incur as her husband. All these things should be well considered, and in your present position, your father, no doubt, will expect you to marry a woman of fortune or rank equal to your own."

"All these objections, with ten times more, will not alter my determination, provided you will consent to our union," he replied.

"As the husband of Miss Douglas, you may be called upon to refund all the rents received, my dear Beauchamp, which would amount to a

large sum indeed. Are your funds sufficient, without crippling your income, to meet such a demand? This is really a most serious responsibility, and my advice to you, as an old friend, is, to give up all thoughts of marrying under such adverse circumstances."

"The rental of property which has already been made over to me by my father, Mr. Harcourt, exceeds twenty-five thousand a year, besides ready money, and if you require to see the deed, with the rent roll, it shall be produced for your satisfaction; but on my word, as a gentleman, this is strictly true, and that has never yet been questioned by any man."

"Oh, that is quite sufficient, my dear young friend, and if my ward is really attached to you—"

"Of which, dear sir, there can be no doubt, since she has accepted and referred me to you."

"Then, my dear Beauchamp, I have no further objection to urge, except that in taking her, you must also take all her liabilities upon yourself."

"Most willingly, my dear sir, were they twice as great."

Mr. Harcourt then suggested he should sign a little memorandum to that effect, which was worded in similar terms to that he had produced for Lord Ayrshire, and having called in the butler to witness Beauchamp's signature to this document, he was about to lead the way to the drawing-room, when Beauchamp interposed, saying, "You have forgotten to give me your written consent, my dear sir, which will ratify the bargain on both sides, and if you will lend your pen a moment, I will trace a few lines which you can sign." Appearing not to notice Mr. Harcourt's evident annoyance at this request, Beauchamp wrote a few lines, by which, among other things, Mr. Harcourt gave his full unconditional consent to the marriage of his ward with Lord Beauchamp, and resigned all right and control over her person, goods, and chattels, from that day, in favour of her affianced husband.

"Rather stringent conditions, Beauchamp," he observed, on reading them.

"Not half so stringent as yours, my dear sir."

"Oh! very well, give me the pen; I can resign her safely to your care."

"Yes, that you certainly may, as we have always regarded each other from childhood as brother and sister; and now, my dear sir," placing the paper in his pocket, "as I have a pressing engagement just now, I will call on Mrs. Harcourt another day."

Beauchamp hastened directly to Blanche, who was impatiently awaiting his return, and catching her in his arms, exclaimed, "Now you are indeed my very own dear Blanche! I have your guardian's consent, my love, at last, and here it is in writing," producing the paper from his pocket; "there, Blanche, read that precious document, conveying yourself, goods and chattels over to my sole keeping. Well, child, is not that doing business in Harcourt's own style? He did not half like the conditions, yet I made him sign them."

"But I fear, William, he made you sign something too?"

"Yes, my love, he did, by which I have taken all the responsibility of this suit, and rejoiced am I to get the control of these matters into my own hands, or he and his lawyer, Borum, would have sacrificed your rights to their blun-

dering. Now, my dear darling girl, I am the happiest fellow in existence, and you shall sing me that song this evening; 'Oh, leave the gay and festive scene!' Yes, my love, we will leave this murky atmosphere, and be off to the dear old Priory again."

"Oh, when shall we go, dear William? I shall be so delighted to be in the country once more."

"Then you do not wish to attend any more gay balls, or even have another night at the Opera?"

"No, no—I am tired to death almost of dissipation."

"And won't you miss that gay throng of courtiers and admirers, who declared they could exist only in the sunshine of your smiles?"

"Fulsome flatterers all, dear William; my love and smiles are for you only, and I never wish to see London again."

"Well then, my love, run off to aunt Gordon, and ask her to prepare for leaving as soon as convenient to herself—the day after to-morrow, if possible."

All the party in Grosvenor Square were much

amused, if not edified, with Beauchamp's description of his interview with Mr. Harcourt and his beating about the bush to ascertain whether he had money enough to bear the brunt of the fight now pending; and Malcolm shook with laughter at the wording of the paper Beauchamp had induced him to sign.

"Why, my dear girl, old Harcourt, by this document, has assigned and made over to Beauchamp all his right and title in you, as if you were a floating cargo of goods or merchandise. What put it in your head, Beauchamp, to write all this down?"

"To make him ashamed of denying his bargain, if he ever felt inclined to do so, and to prevent his again interfering with that dear girl, of whom he has so often tried to make merchandise."

"Well, thank goodness, we are quit of him at last; and now, Beauchamp, if we don't *mangle* that rascally firm of Mangle and Co., it our own fault."

"They shall have it, Malcolm, thick and threefold, and we will see Macvittie to-morrow."

CHAPTER XIV.

The same evening, as Blanche was singing to Beauchamp, the door of the drawing-room opened, and without being announced, the old Squire, now Earl of Annandale, quietly walked in, taking them all by surprise. Constance sprang forward, "My dear, dear father," she exclaimed, and rushed into his arms—Blanche ceased singing, and rose to meet him, although with some hesitation, which observing, he said, "Have I still another daughter?"

"Indeed you have, my dear father," she cried, and was instantly locked in his embrace. "You naughty, undutiful child!" murmured the old

man, as he kissed her forehead, "how could you treat my dear boy so unkindly, by writing such a letter, which drove him nearly crazy?"

"Because I thought my loss of fortune might——"

"What, child! make him love you less?—Oh, Blanche! what a reflection on both our characters!—why, that is the very reason we should love you more, if possible, ten times more. But did you not promise once to love and regard me for ever as your own father?"

"Yes, indeed, and I do respect and love you with all the affection of a daughter."

"Then recollect, my dear child, that all your troubles and trials belong to me as well as yourself; we ought to have no divided feelings or interests. But I see, dear girl, by your pallid face, you have punished yourself as much as William. Come, Blanche, give me another kiss, and promise never to be guilty of such folly again." Pressing her to his heart once more, the old Squire then turned to Lady Malcolm, whom he shook heartily by the hand, then to Mrs. Gordon, with whom he exchanged the most cordial greeting. We will now leave this

once more united happy family, and follow Lord Ayrshire to his club, where he dined with Lord Henry Bayntun. The evening being sultry, an extra quantity of claret was required, which had the usual effect of inducing less restraint in Lord Ayrshire's conversation, who, after his interview with Mr. Harcourt, considering himself secure of the heiress, began to make more particular enquiries of his friend respecting Mr. Mangle and his client's pretensions to her fortune.

"The money is all right enough," replied Lord Henry, "as Mangle tells me the property now lets for ten thousand per annum, and, from his agent's report, in Scotland is certainly worth more."

"Well, but who is the man, or where to be found, who has set up this claim?"

"On that point, Ayrshire, my most particular friend, Mangle, is not disposed to be very communicative, as I pumped him pretty hard the other day without getting anything out; in fact, between ourselves, as Mangle is as arrant a scoundrel as ever swung at Newgate, I've an idea this is a bit of speculation of his own de-

vising, and his client a man of straw. Otherwise, why should he refuse to give his address? I have been thinking this over, and tried him him again this afternoon, with no better success. This looks deucedly suspicious, and my impression is that this rascal has got some deep scheme in his head, and by working on old Harcourt's timidity, thinks to frighten him into terms. Evidently he has the thing in his own hands, and this young Douglas is a nonentity—that's my opinion, Ayrshire."

"Not unlikely, Bayntun—then what do you think the fellow would take for his chance? would thirty thousand pounds choke him off?"

"At once, I should say, or perhaps less money, if he had a proper man to deal with."

"Well, Bayntun, as you know how to deal with these sharks, will you undertake to negotiate with them?"

"For whom?" enquired Lord Henry, with some surprise.

"Myself, Bayntun—for the fact is, I had an interview with Harcourt this morning, and I have signed an agreement to take all responsibility in this suit off his shoulders, and he has agreed I shall marry his ward."

"The deuce you have! why that beats some of our little transactions on the turf all to nothing."

"Oh, it's all fair, Bayntun, and above board—a *quid pro quo*—and you must allow I have, as far as money is concerned, the worst of the bargain."

"Egad, I'm not so sure of that, my dear fellow—the odds are greatly in your favour, and if you are obliged to give Mangle thirty thousand, you still clear an immense stake—it is a capital investment."

"Well, Bayntun, that may be the case or not; but although it did enter into my calculation to compromise with, or buy off, this pretender, yet the fact is, that this girl is precisely the person I have been looking out for a long time, to sit at the head of my table. She is well-bred, highly connected, of graceful and dignified deportment, a perfect lady in manners, and has passed through the ordeal of her first season in town without affectation of any kind, although so generally admired, and without exhibiting the least disposition to flirtation. I have watched her narrowly, Bayntun, and never

could detect the slightest approach to levity in her conduct since the night of our first acquaintance; and the manner in which she has so quietly repulsed any too familiar advances from those puppies, who have been so constantly trying to ingratiate themselves into her favour, has excited my strongest admiration. In short, Bayntun, she is one in a thousand, and last, though not least in the opinion of most men, her features and form are perfection."

"I cannot gainsay a word you have spoken, Ayrshire, in regard to Miss Douglas; and if you obtain her fortune, or half of it even, with herself, you may think yourself a deuced lucky fellow."

"Well, Bayntun, between ourselves — and mind, it must go no further—if you can arrange this little affair with Mangle, at a reasonable rate, say thirty thousand, I will make you a present of a couple of thousands for your trouble."

"Agreed, Ayrshire, I will see him to-morrow morning as soon as he reaches his den; but are you quite sure of the young lady consenting to her guardian's bargain?"

"Oh, my dear fellow, not the least fear of that. Harcourt was to see her directly, and no doubt, under the influence of her aunts, Lady Malcolm and Mrs. Gordon, who will both urge her to comply with his wishes, I look upon it as a settled thing already; no girl of common sense or prudence could decline such an offer."

"Perhaps not; yet you have heard, I suppose, that although one man may lead a horse to water, two cannot make him drink; and this young filly may have a will of her own, as well as a love of her own."

"Pooh, nonsense! Bayntun; just now no man would come forward as I have done—the risk is too great, and the fancy of marrying for love is become quite out of date."

"Not quite, Ayrshire; however, I will attend to my part of the business early to-morrow, and meet you here at three o'clock; so now, good night."

At ten o'clock the next morning, Lord Henry drove to Lincoln's Inn and found Mangle at home, with whom he at first entered on some affairs of his own, to allay any suspicions about the heiress's property, and was about leaving,

when, taking his hat, Lord Henry said in a careless tone, "Well, Mangle, I forgot to ask how you got on with old Harcourt; the news is all over town, and the heiress at rather a low figure in the betting world, there being long odds against her getting married this season."

"Ah, my Lord, you are always thinking about your betting book, instead of other matters; but I think Mr. Harcourt is pretty well satisfied by this time that our cause is a good one."

"Well, Mangle, I'll have a bet with you—an even five-and-twenty—you don't win the stakes, notwithstanding."

"Thank you, my Lord, I am not a betting man."

"Say five, then, Mangle—anything for a bet—shall I enter it in my log?" taking out his pocket book.

"Oh no, my Lord, I really never bet at all—not even five shillings. I should lose my practice, were it known I was a betting man."

"Stuff and nonsense, Mangle; but come, if you won't do business in one line, you will, perhaps, in another. I'm in a speculative humour this morning, and want something on hand, so

I'll buy your chance, if you will offer fair terms, out and out, and set up for the girl myself."

"But where, my Lord, could you find the money, were I disposed to deal with you?"

"Oh, my friend Moses in the city, or some other old clothes man; but that's nothing to you, I'll find it somehow, if I can make fair terms—that is, to get paid for my trouble. Egad! it's not a bad spec."

"But the young lady, my Lord?"

"We are on capital terms, Mangle, although I don't know much of Harcourt—that will follow—now for the price—what's the figure?"

"Well, you know, my Lord, it can only be done with my client's consent; but, without prejudice, say a hundred thousand guineas."

"A hundred thousand devils, Mangle!—why, that's half the value of the property!"

"Not anything like it, my Lord, with all the arrears."

"All chaff about the arrears, my worthy friend; and then, just look at your chance with Lord Malcolm, who swears he will take the matter out of Harcourt's hands, throw it into Chancery, and keep it there the next ten years,

and carry it, if necessary, to the House of Lords. Your client must be a man of substance to stand this racket."

"Well, perhaps he is, my Lord; but Lord Malcolm is reported not over rich."

"He is just on the point of marrying a young lady with two hundred thousand pounds—to my loss, I am sorry to say, having made a bet on the subject,—so there's no mistake in that matter."

Mr. Mangle looking rather serious at this intelligence, Lord Henry said, "Come, Mangle, I'll take you at the odds laid last night at Brooks'—seven to one on Miss Douglas against the field; which means Mangle and Co., with their backer."

"You don't mean to say, my Lord, that wagers are being publicly laid on this suit?"

"I do, though, my unsophisticated friend, and here," showing the entry in his book, "is my bet with Martingale, who offered it freely round the table—seven to one against Mangle and Co."

The lawyer looked aghast at this damnatory opinion of his case, and enquired how it was possible gentlemen on the turf could know any-

thing of matters so entirely out of their province.

"We bet on every event, anything, everything that is discussed at the club," replied Lord Henry; "and we have fellows well paid, besides jockeys and trainers, to give us the information we require. *You* are in the market now, and the odds are increasing against you every day; first three, then five, now seven; and to-night, they say, ten to one will be offered on the heiress winning in a canter."

"Really, my Lord, this is too bad."

"You can't help yourself, my worthy friend," replied Lord Henry; "but now I will make you an offer of thirty thousand pounds for your chance, money down."

"Indeed, my Lord, we could not accept such a trifling sum."

"A fair offer, Mangle, well calculated, taking Chancery suit and all into account, with heavy damages to the losing party."

"To-morrow I shall offer only twenty," putting on his hat. "Is it a bargain or not? can't wait any longer."

"I will report your proposal to my client," replied Mr. Mangle, musing, "and you shall know

his opinion to-morrow evening, say at four o'clock, if you will call here."

We must now go back to see what had passed in Upper Brook Street, after Beauchamp's departure the preceding day. Mr. Harcourt, on repairing to the drawing-room, was interrogated by his spouse as to the purport of Lord Ayrshire's and Beauchamp's visit, who, having given a full explanation of his transactions with them, said exultingly, "Well, my dear, don't you think I have made a capital bargain, in getting rid of this responsibility on such easy terms?"

"By making a fool of the Marquis, Mr. Harcourt."

"Oh, no, my dear, he has made a fool of himself by offering a second time, when I told him he had little chance of success. But it is quite a different affair with Beauchamp; there the thing is settled off at once, and I am now relieved from a load of care and apprehension."

"And the man I disliked above all others recognized as my niece's accepted husband, Mr. Harcourt; very complimentary, indeed, and consolatory to my feelings. He could not have married her for three years, at least, without

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"And the man I disliked above all others recognized as my niece's accepted husband, Mr. Harcourt; very complimentary, indeed, and consolatory to my feelings. He could not have married her for three years, at least, without

your consent; *that*, out of deference to my wishes, you ought to have withheld."

"And saddled myself with about fifty thousand pounds in costs and arrears of rent, my dear; where could I have found the money? *That*, it seems, has not entered into your calculation. Would you like to give up your carriage and horses, just to spite Beauchamp?"

"No, Mr. Harcourt, certainly not; but you might insist on her accepting Lord Ayrshire—or force Mrs. Gordon to bear the expenses."

"Pooh! nonsense, my dear, it is idle talking in that strain, it cannot be done. Lord Beauchamp has now become a man of consequence in our county, and it is our policy to be on good terms with him and his father; besides which, he used to be a favourite with you once, as well as myself, and has really done nothing to forfeit our good opinion. I never objected to the man, but his means; and as your niece will be raised to the rank you have desired so earnestly, it is perfectly absurd, my dear, raising any further objections. You have got what you coveted for your niece, rank and riches, with a magnificent place; Blanche has got the man she loved, and I have got out of my difficulties; so now, my

dear, I can afford to make you a present of two hundred pounds—(which he laid before her)—to help pay your milliner's bill, and purchase any little extras you require, before we leave London."

"Well, my love," replied the lady, quite mollified, "I dare say you have acted very wisely in this business, and if you are satisfied, I am content to submit to your decision."

Mr Harcourt had only one more little unpleasantness to encounter, in his interview with the Marquis, which was readily disposed of by informing him the next day, when he called, that his ward, Miss Douglas, had confessed her long attachment to Mr., now Lord Beauchamp, and declared her resolution to marry no other."

"But surely, Mr. Harcourt, Lord Beauchamp would not think of marrying Miss Douglas under existing circumstances."

"Indeed, he does, my Lord, and since our interview yesterday has called here, and taken every responsibility on himself."

"And you, Mr. Harcourt, have given your consent to the marriage?"

"It was useless, my Lord, my attempting to refuse it, as Lord Beauchamp had obtained the consent of her other guardian, Mrs. Gordon."

"Oh, very well, sir," replied the Marquis, rising with great dignity and indignation; "then I have the honour to wish you good morning, sir;" and with head erect, he stalked fiercely out of the room, cursing Harcourt in his heart, as he walked down stairs, for a mean, cowardly driveller. "D— the fellow!" muttered Lord Ayrshire, "I saw by his quivering lip he had sold me, and would have laid my cane over his shoulders, but for the *exposé* of the whole affair, and that infernal paper I was fool enough to sign. Yet, confound the fellow, *that* I must recover at any rate;" and he turned quickly back for that purpose, and again entering the room, said, "I had forgotten, sir, a little document I was foolishly induced by you to sign yesterday."

"Oh, certainly, my Lord, I will deliver it to you immediately," taking it from his desk, and expressing his regret at not being able to carry out his lordship's wishes.

"I will thank you, Mr. Harcourt, notwithstanding, to observe your promise of secrecy in this transaction, or the consequence may be as unpleasant to yourself as to me."

"Oh, certainly, my Lord," replied Harcourt,

"nothing which has occurred between us shall ever escape my lips."

"I hope not, sir, for your sake as well as my own," growled Lord Ayrshire, who, crumpling the paper in his hand, turned majestically to the door.

CHAPTER XV.

The Marquis, furious at his rejection and Mr. Harcourt's duplicity, was in no very complacent humour when he met Lord Henry three hours afterwards at his club; and he at once said he was so thoroughly disgusted with Harcourt's conduct in trying to make a Jew bargain with him, that he had declined having anything more to do with him.

"Then you have resigned all pretensions to Miss Douglas, Ayrshire? Is that fact?"

"Exactly, Bayntun."

"What, after the agreement you signed yesterday? How is this?"

"Harcourt would not stand to his terms; so I

quashed the thing off-hand with that double-dealing old humbug."

"Then you have made an ass of me, Ayrshire, also, as I have seen Mangle on the matter, who, I have no doubt, will accept your proposal for his client, and I am to call again in Lincoln's Inn this evening."

"It cannot be helped now, Bayntun—the thing is at an end."

"Not quite, Ayrshire; my part of the contract has been performed."

"Oh, I understand;—we can talk of that another day, as I am in a great hurry now to keep an engagement, and my horse is waiting."

Lord Henry, nettled at this cool treatment, determined to find out more; and meeting Lord Malcolm soon after in the park, asked some questions about his cousin, whether there was any truth in the report of her being engaged to Lord Ayrshire.

"Not the slightest," was the reply.

"Indeed, Malcolm, are you quite sure?"

"Positive, Bayntun; but who is your newsmonger?"

"Well, what would you say to a hint from

the man himself, that it was, or would be, the case without doubt."

"Do you mean to imply that Ayrshire told you he had been accepted by my cousin, Bayntun?"

There was no reply, but a knowing look and a provoking smile on his face, which at once rousing Lord Malcolm's temper, he hastily said:

"Lord Ayrshire was flatly refused by Miss Douglas, who has been engaged to my friend, Beauchamp, for the last six months, to my certain knowledge—there, Bayntun, I conclude that is plain enough, and strong enough to check any further idle boasting about her."

"Is the thing quite settled, Malcolm?"

"Quite so," was the reply; "and her guardian's consent obtained."

"What a fool Ayrshire has made of me then," exclaimed Lord Henry; and, without hesitation, he related all that had occurred between them, and his interview with Mangle.

"Upon my word, Bayntun, this beats horse-dealing, with those two fellows bantering and bargaining for my cousin as if she was to be put up to auction, and knocked down to the highest bidder—confound it, sir, this is too bad; and I will expose their audacious proceedings to the world."

"Serve them both right, Malcolm—but don't be in too great a hurry—although Ayrshire has treated me very cavalierly also."

"Well, Bayntun, you may serve *us* now,—so go—keep your appointment with that rascal, Mangle; and if you can pick out what you suspect, and I believe, to be the case, that it is a trumped-up affair, by Jove! I'll give you the two thousand pounds, and engage Beauchamp shall give you two more."

"On your honour, Malcolm, are you in earnest?"

"On my oath, if necessary."

"Enough, old fellow, I'm off to Lincoln's Inn, and will meet you to-morrow at the club, at two o'clock."

There being a grand reunion that night at Lady Hasleton's, Lord Henry was there, and knowing his *penchant* for Miss Douglas, Lady Fanny Trimmer began bantering him on the sudden downfall of his idol, "What a fortunate escape for your Lordship—and Ayrshire, after such very particular attentions, has altered his tone completely this evening—can't endure the name of Douglas now—hah, hah!"

"No wonder Ayrshire has changed his key,"

replied Lord Henry, "when he found all the notes in B flat."

"Rejected! Lord Henry—do you really mean to say he has been refused by that pretty little impostor?"

"She is no impostor," replied Lord Henry, indignantly—"but an impostor has laid claim to her property, to which he has no more right than I have—that fact has come to my knowledge this day; and as for Ayrshire and others sneering at and running down Miss Douglas now, it is because she has rejected half a score of them, at least, before a word was said about her loss of fortune."

"You astonish me, Lord Henry—refuse Ayrshire!—impossible. What girl in her senses could commit such folly?"

"I suppose, then, when young ladies are in love, they *are* out of their senses—and, therefore, Miss Douglas, having been attached to Lord Beauchamp before she made her *début* in the London world, has been mad enough to prefer him to all our gay men of *ton*."

"Gracious goodness! how romantic! and Lord Beauchamp really intends to marry her, notwithstanding this claim upon her property."

"Yes," replied Lord Henry, "if she had not a shilling in the world—but I wish I were as secure of my bets, as she is of her rights."

Lady Fanny Trimmer was not slow to communicate the intelligence received from Lord Henry to her numerous acquaintances; and the news spread quickly through the gay assembly, that Lord Ayrshire had been rejected by the heiress. Sir John Martingale, having experiencd a similar check, which he attributed to the influence of the Marquis, could not forbear expressing his satisfaction at his rival's discomfiture, and on meeting him, said, "So, Ayrshire, it seems you are on the wrong side of the post yourself, as well as one or two other men, in spite of all your jockeying to hustle and bustle them off the course."

"I don't comprehend you, Martingale?"

"Well, then, my Lord, it is rumoured you have failed to induce Miss Douglas to become Marchioness of Ayrshire."

"And who, sir, has had the audacity to circulate such a report?" enquired the Marquis, in a violent passion.

"It is all over the room, my Lord, and no longer a secret."

"Your authority, sir?" demanded the Marquis, imperiously.

"That you shall have, my Lord, if you will assert it is not true."

"That is nothing to the purpose, sir. I require your authority."

"I heard the news from Lady Fanny Trimmer, who was telling it openly," replied the baronet.

"The devil in petticoats!" muttered the Marquis, as he turned away to find the wholesale retailer of scandal. But his worst fears were realised, when he was referred by that sarcastic lady to Lord Henry Bayntun, and the look of savage despair with which he received this unlooked-for disclosure from his quondam friend, confirmed Lady Fanny's impression that the report was perfectly true. "Hah! hah!" she laughed, as the Marquis abruptly left her, without a word in return, "the arrow has pierced the bull's eye this time, and the fastidious Marquis has fallen by the bow of a simple country maiden."

Not daring to question Lord Henry, whose pride and quick temper were equal to his own, for fear of a thorough *exposé* of his transactions

with Harcourt, Lord Ayrshire quitted the room, and left London a few days after, on a continental tour; ridiculed by all his associates—regretted by none.

The next day, Malcolm held a long consultation with Lord Henry, who had prevailed on Mangle to accept the thirty thousand pounds in satisfaction of his client's claim.

"It's a hollow thing," said he, "and my impression is, we could catch this rascal out with a little more trouble."

"Well, Bayntun, if you do not regard the trouble, and can succeed with us in upsetting him altogether, Beauchamp and myself will double our stakes, and make you a present of ten thousand pounds, which I hope will set you straight."

"Will you, by Jove, Malcolm?"

"Yes, we will, indeed, and sign an agreement to that effect, if you require it."

"No, no, old fellow, I can trust your word and Beauchamp's—but a thought has struck me, which I think will help us a little to clear up this mystery. In Mangle's den—which, by the way, is a dark gloomy room—there is a sham book case, lettered outside with reports

and law books, but hollow within, and the key generally left in the door of this closet, which contains only a few old dusty parchments. Now, as I know he will be absent to-morrow from two until four o'clock, I will take my tiger with me, who is a sharp, quick boy, smuggle him into the closet, whilst I write a few lines just to rouse him a little, and return for an answer in half-an-hour, leaving the boy, with the key inside, to hear the remarks Mangle makes on my letter, which I shall leave on his table."

"But suppose he should discover the boy?"

"Then the little rascal shall have his story all ready, to say he got there to overhear what his master and the lawyer were talking about; and a caning from me—which of course won't hurt him over much—but I shall watch my friend into his den, and allow him time only to read the letter."

"Well, Bayntun," replied Malcolm, "I must leave you to your own devices,—so now, good bye, as Beauchamp is waiting for me."

About half past three the following day, Lord Henry drove in his cab to Lincoln's Inn, with his tiger behind, to whom he had previously given instructions how to act, and his training-

groom inside, dressed as a gentleman, who held the reins, while Lord Henry alighted at Mangle's door, and going to the clerk's room, enquired if he had returned.

"No, my Lord," was the reply, "but we expect him in at four o'clock."

"Very well," said Lord Henry, "I cannot wait now, but as I wish to see him on particular business, I will write a note in his room, and leave it on his table."

"Oh, certainly, my Lord," showing him into his employer's sanctum, and placing writing materials before him, after which, the clerk returned to his own business, and the boy, who had been standing outside the entrance watching his opportunity, slipped in unperceived, and was immediately ensconced in his hiding place. The purport of Lord Henry's note was to propose an interview with Mr. Archibald Douglas, Mangle's supposed client, to come to a final arrangement the next afternoon at four o'clock, and that he would return for an answer in half an hour. Having finished his dispatch, and whispered the boy to keep his ears open and mouth shut, Lord Henry halloed to the clerk, saying,

he had left the note and would call again between four and five, and jumping into his cab, drove off towards the West End, where, leaving it with directions to his man to drive home and return to the same place at five o'clock, he retraced his steps to Lincoln's Inn, and watched on the opposite side of the Square until he saw Mangle re-enter his office. "That will do," muttered Lord Henry, "now ten minutes to allow him time to read my note, and I'll warrant, by his private ejaculations, Tom picks something out."

The boy experienced some queer sensations when he heard the lion bounce into his den, followed by the clerk, who said Lord Henry had been there writing a note, and would call again; but his terror was considerably increased when the lawyer attempted to open the bookcase to deposit his bag.

"Where's the key, sir?" demanded Mangle of the clerk; "I left it here when I went out."

"Can't say, sir," replied the man; "perhaps you put it in your pocket."

"No, sir, I did not," retorted Mangle, "I never do," fumbling all the while to see if it were there.

"Well, sir, I heard you lock the door when you took out your bag, and perhaps you have dropped the key somewhere."

"I did no such thing, Mr. Scribble; but there, get along now, and mind you find it before you leave the office."

This little affair ruffled Mr. Mangle's excitable temper sufficiently to create an explosion on reading Lord Henry's note.

"What the devil does this blackleg of a Lord want to see my client for? — some sharping trick, I suppose—but there, that cock won't fight. Confound the fellow! he'd let the cat out of the bag, or sell me, perhaps, at once. Monkton is a keen rascal in some things, although a confounded ass in others, good-looking and all that sort of thing, but my Lord will be sure to catch him tripping—he's a deuced deep hand that Lord Henry, and would know a snob from a gentleman in the twinkling of his eye. No, no, it won't do, it won't do—but I must go down to Brompton this evening, and see what I can make of the fool—but confound it! here's Lord Henry," as his Lordship halloed to the clerk to enquire if Mr. Mangle had returned?

"Yes, my Lord, you will find him in his room."

"Halloa! Mangle," exclaimed Lord Henry, "put your hat on, a moment, and just walk with me to the end of the Square, as I am all behind time, horse taken ill, and obliged to send him home; we can walk and talk, as well as sit and talk, so come along."

They had no sooner left the room than the boy emerged from his hiding place, and recollecting the discussion about the key, locked the closet door again, and throwing it under Mangle's chair, slipped noiselessly from the apartment, and walked in a different direction to his master; but a sharp whistle, before he turned the other corner of the Square, satisfied Lord Henry that his tiger had escaped. That was all he required. Mangle fruitlessly endeavoured to shake Lord Henry's purpose of seeing his client, "Why surely, my Lord," argued the lawyer, "his signature will be quite sufficient; what more can you require?"

"To see and know the man, Mangle, and witness with my own eyes his hand writing. Did any one ever hear of such a one-sided bargain as this, not to know or even see the

principal you are dealing with—come, come, Mangle, this won't do with men on the turf."

"Well, my Lord, I will endeavour to meet your wishes; but I am not sure that Mr. Douglas is in London."

"Very well,—then I must wait till he is," replied Lord Harry, "and now, good evening."

The tiger, seeing the coast clear of the lawyer, quickly joined his master, and told him what he had overheard Mangle muttering to himself on reading the note.

"By Jove! Tom, it's all right, just as I expected," exclaimed his Lordship, "and your fortune is made, my boy, if things turn out as I believe they will. Now you go back into the Square, to the elm trees, where you can keep your eye on Mangle's doorway—watch him like a cat at a mouse-hole, and if he leaves the office before I return, follow close on his heels, whether he takes omnibus or cab, to Brompton—mark the number of the house he calls at, and wait for me in the road, at the upper turning."

After giving these directions, Lord Henry went in search of a Bow Street officer, and having made him don his best and look as little

like a man of his calling as possible, they returned to Lincoln's Inn—but the boy was no where to be seen. They then walked into Holborn, got into a cab, and pulling down the blinds, drove to the Brompton road. Tom was on his post at the corner, and Lord Henry seeing him, pulled up, when the boy, running to the door, whispered the number of the house which he said the lawyer had just left, and was walking towards his own home, which lay farther down the road. The cab was dismissed, and Lord Henry with his friend approached arm-in-arm to the house. On ringing the bell, the door was opened by a servant girl, who seeing a handsome looking gentleman in Lord Henry, (the officer having turned his back towards her,) said she believed Mr. Monkton was at home; on which both entered the passage, and the door was closed.

"What name shall I say, sir?" asked the girl.

A friend's card being substituted for his own, Lord Henry was shown up stairs into a back sitting-room, and a tall, rather genteel-looking young man came forward to meet him.

"Your name is Monkton, sir, I believe," said

Lord Henry. A bow was returned only. "I wish to know," continued his Lordship, "whether you are really Mr. Monkton or not, before entering on my business."

"My name is Monkton, sir."

"And I think you are acquainted with a friend of mine also, Mr. Mangle, of Lincoln's Inn," added Lord Henry.

An affirmative being given, Lord Henry proceeded, "You have assumed another name lately, Mr. Monkton, that of Douglas, and are attempting to set up a claim to the property of Miss Douglas, in Scotland, on the plea of being her cousin." The eyes of Lord Henry, were riveted on Monkton's face, (from which the Bow Street officer had never wandered since entering the room,) and he turned pale during this address, his lips quivering with fear, when Lord Henry reading guilt in his averted looks, suddenly exclaimed, "You are an impostor, sir,"—"And my prisoner," added the official, producing a pair of hand-cuffs. "I am a Bow Street officer, Mr. Monkton, alias Douglas, alias Jones; and I think, sir, I have had the pleasure of meeting you before."

In a moment the culprit fell on his knees

before Lord Henry, begging and imploring not to be sent to prison, and he would reveal everything—"Indeed, sir, I have been put up to this by Mangle, indeed I have, and will tell you the whole plot if you will only spare me."

"You are a d——d rascal!" exclaimed Lord Henry, "and deserve to be transported; but what shall we do, Forrester?"

"Cage him, my Lord, cage him, by all manner of means; he gave me the slip once before in a little swindling affair—'tis the same youngster, I verily believe."

"Oh no, sir; indeed I never saw you before in my life, to the best of my recollection."

"Which seems so werry bad, young gentleman," replied Forrester, "that it wants brushing up a little; you'll soon remember something more, when we have a quiet chat in the lock-up to-night. But stay a moment, just let me have a look at my memorandum book. 'Mark M. on left arm,'"—and without ceremony, pulling up the young man's sleeve, "Here it is, my Lord," exclaimed the officer, "right as a trivet."

On this discovery, Monkton's appeals to Lord Henry for mercy were renewed, offering to make

a full confession if he would only spare him being sent to prison.

"Then sit down and let us hear what you have to say first," replied his lordship, "and I will put it down on paper."

Monkton then made the following declaration: that his aunt, now Mrs. Douglas, but formerly Miss Monkton, had left England as the mistress of Mr. Douglas, to whom she had been married only a few weeks previous to his death, and when there remained no hopes of his recovery. That on her return to London she was advised to consult Mr. Mangle on the state of her affairs, and with the aid and advice of that worthy, a plot was concocted to substitute himself as her son instead of nephew, and alter the date of the marriage certificate to two years previous to the time of its being performed; and he, Monkton, was to be substituted by his aunt and another woman, as her son, born in wedlock, and therefore heir to the property.

"Very good indeed," said Forrester, when Monkton ceased speaking, "a very pretty little scheme; just the sort of thing to get a man's passage paid for him across the herring pool. Have

you ever been in India, Mr. Monkton?" enquired Forrester.

"I don't remember being there, sir; perhaps I may, when very young."

"Oh, very likely, with your mamma," added the officer, laughing; "but it will be my business now to find out your birth, parentage, and education, young gentleman; and I rather think your worthy father fills a situation at the London Docks."

There was no reply.

"Is that true or not, you young rascal?" demanded Forrester.

"Oh, yes, sir," replied Monkton; "but my father knows nothing of this business, indeed he don't."

"Well, you young villain, I've got you now, safe enough; your father will perhaps lose his situation when this thing is made known, and you will be transported to a dead certainty.—Now, my Lord, I await your orders, time presses, and I must return."

"Then my decision is this: before I see Lord Malcolm, take this young gentleman with you to your own house, and keep him there until to-morrow at twelve o'clock, by which time I

shall have Lord Malcolm's instructions how to act. Treat him well, and ascertain all about his family, his mother particularly, if she is still living, and where."

"Yes, my Lord," replied Monkton, "my father and mother live together at No. 8, Dock Street."

"Very well, send for them to be at your house then, Forrester, to-morrow by twelve o'clock; but no communication before we arrive; and now, Mr. Monkton," said Lord Henry, "if you make a clean breast of the whole business, I will endeavour to persuade Lord Malcolm to deal leniently with you. Good night, Forrester, and mind your charge," and Lord Henry ran down stairs, slipping half-a-crown into the girl's hand, got into a cab, and drove furiously to Grosvenor Square. The ladies had just left the dining-room, when Lord Henry, without any ceremony, rushed in, exclaiming: "I have won my bet, Malcolm, and nabbed the impostor, Mr. Archibald Douglas, alias Monkton, alias Jones, and left him in old Forrester's clutches."

"Hurrah!" shouted Malcolm. "Thank God!" ejaculated the old Earl. "Bravo!"

cried Beauchamp, as Lord Henry proceeded in his story. "But you have not dined yet, Bayntun," the latter remarked.

"I never think of dinner, Beauchamp, when I've work on hand; but won't refuse some now;" which being immediately ordered, he succinctly related all that occurred since his interview with Mangle.

"Well done! capital! excellent!" was echoed by all; "a lawyer outwitted at last!"

The soup being placed on the table, Beauchamp ran up stairs to give Blanche the joyful intelligence, and taking her aside, whispered, "Can you bear good news, my dearest girl, as well as you have borne bad?"

"Oh, yes, dear William, I hope I can."

"Then our suspicions are verified, and the impostor who assumed your name is in custody."

"Thank heaven, dear William!" she cried, falling into his arms and bursting into tears; "then I have not been a usurper of another's rights."

"No, my love, Lord Henry has unravelled the iniquitous plot, got up by that villain, Mangle, and is now having some dinner below,

whilst I ran up to tell you that you are the heiress still."

Lady Malcolm, Mrs. Gordon, and Constance now crowded round Beauchamp, kissing Blanche, and expressing their rapturous delight at the recovery of her fortune, whilst he was giving a more detailed account of Lord Henry's clever trick in catching the lawyer. Leaving the ladies to the enjoyment of mutual felicitations, Beauchamp descended to the dining-room, where Lord Henry, having quickly dispatched his dinner, was discussing with Malcolm, over their claret, the proceedings to be taken on the morrow; and it being finally arranged that Malcolm and Beauchamp should meet him the next day at Forrester's house, at twelve o'clock, Lord Henry soon after took his leave, saying he had engaged to attend the Duchess of B——'s grand re-union that evening.

CHAPTER XVI.

Being fully enlisted on the Douglas side, Lord Henry astonished his friend Danby and others with his adventures of the day, and speaking in high terms of the Earl of Annandale and Beauchamp, said, "Father and son are both trumps, and have invited me to stay with them at Bampton the whole of next hunting season, and given me *carte blanche* to shoot over their property in the north, with quarters at the Castle whenever I like to go there."

"Deuced liberal indeed," replied Sir John Martindale; "I wish you would introduce me, Bayntun, to Beauchamp."

"What! to try whether you could be more

successful with Lady Beauchamp than you have been with Miss Douglas? No, indeed, my boy, your flirtations with young married women are too notorious already, and Beauchamp is very particular in these matters, although as warm and kind-hearted a fellow as ever breathed."

"Then it is all settled, Bayntun, that Miss Douglas is to become Lady Beauchamp."

"Quite, Martingale, and Malcolm marries Beauchamp's sister, and two handsomer couples never stood at the altar."

"That's true enough, Bayntun, and I only wish I could stand in Beauchamp's shoes on that one morning."

"Ay, ay, Martingale, you are not singular in that wish; witness Danby, poor fellow, whom I do pity; but Ayrshire and others not. However, Beauchamp and Miss Douglas have been attached since boy and girl, so says Malcolm, and may the devil take the man who would part them — that's my opinion, Martingale;" with which Lord Henry turned away, and forthwith communicated to Lady Fanny Trimmer and other ladies, whose jealousy of the heiress was well known, the not very gratifying information of her opponent's defeat and the capture of the

impostor. Selina Markham alone rejoiced at her friend's re-establishment in her just rights, and remarked to Lord Henry, "Beauchamp is not quite the spooney I took him for, and verifies the old saying, 'that silent birds pick up most grubs.' Will has been running mute, like one of his cunning old hounds when the fox is sinking, and beaten the flashy town pack by gloriously. Hurrah for the provincials! we shall have a jolly time of it this winter—hunt six days a week, with open house at Bampton. Balls and dinner parties without end. Won't you come down, Lord Henry, and see how we do things in our quiet county?"

"Not very quiet, I suspect, Miss Markham, if I am to judge by what I hear of your gaieties and hospitalities of last winter; Danby says he enjoyed himself amazingly."

"Ah, yes, I dare say he did; but then he saw everything *couleur de rose*—every scene was one of enchantment to him, where Blanche was present."

"Ah, Miss Markham, Danby is deucedly cut up about that little affair; but he did not go the way to mend matters by playing the grandee over Beauchamp. Your sex are ever ready to

avenge an insult offered to their favourites, and from the night of his purposely excluding Beauchamp from the last ball at Castleton House, Miss Douglas has scarcely noticed him; but for this piece of folly, he would have stood second favourite at least—certainly before Ayrshire; and my advice is never to throw away a chance, as the first favourite does not always come in a winner."

"But in a love-race is seldom a loser, Lord Henry, if the young lady has to decide herself."

"Then Miss Douglas, in your opinion, would neither have accepted Danby, Ayrshire, or any other, notwithstanding Harcourt's assertions to the contrary, and would have continued constant to Beauchamp until she became mistress of her own fortune?"

"Certainly, Lord Henry; still waters run deep, and Blanche feels deeply, although her true character is not known to common acquaintances."

"Well, Miss Markham, she has made fools of many knowing hands this season."

"Or rather," replied Selina, "they have made fools of themselves, by choosing to assume that a young country girl must of necessity be such

a simpleton as to be taken directly by their flattering, fulsome, fine speeches. We are not quite the Jenny Raws you are condescending enough to think us, my Lord."

"So it appears, Miss Markham; and I'll bet a cool hundred, Ayrshire does not forget the name of Douglas for these next ten years, if then. Well, that supercilious fool wanted a settler, and he has got one at last. Egad! all the women were at him like magpies round a tame hawk, when they found his wing had been clipped, and he bolted at once for the continent. And you, Miss Markham, have, I fear, made sad havoc with some hearts also."

"Not with yours, my Lord, I hope."

"Why, no, not exactly yet, Miss Markham; although, I must confess a little penchant was beginning to spring up, when I was informed you had decided on being an old man's darling."

"Well, my Lord, if such were the case, that is far preferable to being a gambler's wife."

"Thank you for that compliment, Miss Markham."

"Which your impertinence called forth, Lord Henry—young gentlemen should not pry into the secrets of ladies' work boxes, where they

may find needles which will prick their fingers."

"It is only what I deserved; but I hope we shall still be friends, and I will keep clear of the needles for the future, which I feel can prick confoundedly. But why call a lady's heart a workbox?"

"Because the heart lies in the chest, and an Italian friend of mine would persist in calling a pain in his chest a pain in his *box;* but this pain in his box was cured by marrying the lady who caused it."

"Well, Miss Markham, I have always heard matrimony was a specific cure for that tormenting malady called love."

"It may allay the unpleasant irritation attending it, without working a radical cure, Lord Henry, except in such cases as my friend, the Count's, whose disorder was of a most acute and highly inflammatory kind; but in a chronic disease of long standing, the patient seldom expects or hopes for a remedy; and now I think it is time for me to bid adieu to these fairy scenes and you, as we leave town to-morrow for Barton Court, where, probably, I may have the

pleasure of seeing you and showing you the way to clear a five-barred gate after the Bampton Foxhounds."

"Nothing would delight me more than to follow such a leader," replied Lord Henry; "and if alive, I shall certainly avail myself of Beauchamp's kind invitation."

We must now look after our friend, Mangle, who (having hired a lodging for Monkton in the Brompton Road, where he called twice daily in his way to and from his office, to watch his client, or rather tool, as well as his case) was struck dumb with astonishment the next morning by the information given him when calling, by the landlady, that his charge had been carried off the previous evening by a Bow Street officer.

"A Bow Street officer, ma'am!" exclaimed Mangle, in bewilderment.

"Yes, sir, I did say a Bow Street officer; on a charge of forgery, sir; and ain't you ashamed of yourself, Mr. Mangle, to put a dirty fellow of that sort into a respectable widowed woman's house? It'll be my ruin, sir, palming a low vagabond like that off as a gentleman of fortune. It's a nasty blackguard trick, and

although you may be a lawyer, I'll have the law of you for making my house a *sceptical* for thieves and pickpockets."

"Hold your clatter, you old beldame," cried Mangle, "it's false, I say—it's all a lie."

"It's all true, I say, you rapscallion of a man. I heard the fellow falling on his knees—cry for mercy—and confess all about it; he said that lawyer Mangle put him up to forging the deed, and my Lord took it down on paper, and the man you call Monkton signed his name, and swore it was true every word, that was written."

"The devil he did!" exclaimed Mangle; "what a rascal! and who was the Lord?"

"Can't say, Mr. Mangle, as I don't know and don't care; but he was called Lord Henry somebody."

"Hell and destruction!" muttered Mangle, as he rushed from the door and jumped into a cab that was passing; "it's all over with me!"

Returning to his house, the lawyer wrote a short note to his partners, telling them what had occurred, and that, in consequence, he should leave town for a short time, until the thing had blown over; and taking all the money he had in his strong box, he immediately started for

America. At twelve o'clock the same morning, Malcolm and Beauchamp met Lord Henry at the private residence of the Bow Street officer, and found Mr. Monkton in a most communicative mood; and it was evident from this young gentleman's confessions, that Mangle was the originator and inventor of the plot, and the alteration in the date of the marriage certificate made by his own hand. Monkton's father and mother were also in attendance, both declaring they knew nothing of the business in which their son was implicated, as he had ceased to live with them for several months. The father implored Malcolm and Beauchamp not to prosecute his son, or he should most likely be dismissed from his employment in the docks. "Indeed, my Lords," pleaded he, "the lad, although wilful and wayward sometimes, would never have imagined such a trick as this—he is only the dupe of that rascally lawyer."

"But your sister," replied Beauchamp, "is also concerned in this conspiracy—Where is she?"

"She has lived at Islington, my Lord, since her return from India; but as she passes herself off for a lady now, we seldom meet, and she is too good or too bad for us humble people."

"Very well, Mr. Monkton," continued Beauchamp, "then I shall require you to go with me and Lord Malcolm to her residence, whilst your wife remains here until our return; your son will then swear to the statement he has made, before a magistrate, and you must be bound over to produce him as a witness against Mangle, when required—do you agree to this proposal?"

"Yes, my Lord, most willingly."

"Very well; then, Bayntun, will you be kind enough to await our return from Islington?"

This was readily assented to, and Beauchamp and Malcolm, with Monkton, drove directly to Islington, where they found Mrs. Douglas at home. Leaving Monkton below, they were ushered into her sitting-room, when Beauchamp thus addressed her.

"Your name is Douglas, I presume, Madam?"

"Yes, sir, it is."

"You have set up a claim, I believe, to the property of Miss Douglas in Scotland, on behalf of a young man you call your son."

"He *is* my son, sir, and I'll swear to it—born in lawful wedlock, and Miss Douglas will soon be bundled out of her ill-gotten estates."

"You audacious woman!" exclaimed Beauchamp, in just indignation; "your plot is discovered, and this young scamp you would perjure yourself to prove your son, is now in custody, and his father in this house—call Mr. Monkton up, Malcolm." The lady sat in speechless horror at this sudden announcement; and when her brother entered the room, fell back senseless in her chair. Restoratives being promptly applied, she soon recovered; but "a change came over the spirit of her dream," on her brother saying her trick was found out, and that she must now expect to go to prison for it, as Dick had confessed all. Tears and entreaties were now substituted for boasts and threats, and appeals for mercy to Beauchamp, on account of her children, who would be thrown almost penniless on the world.

"Indeed, indeed, sir," she cried, "Mr. Douglas had very little to leave me when he died; and I have scarcely sufficient to support them and myself."

"The children of Mr. Douglas, although illegitimate," replied Beauchamp, "shall not want a friend; neither shall you be left destitute—on one condition—that you make a full con-

fession of the part you have taken in this business."

"Do it, Susan," whispered her brother, "'tis your only chance; and trust to his Lordship's generosity."

"I will make no terms with your sister, Mr. Monkton," added Beauchamp, "no promises of any kind; but will leave you with her alone for a few minutes, to decide how to act."

In a quarter of an hour Monkton came down to say his sister was ready to accompany them and make her declaration before a magistrate, that she had no children born after her marriage with Mr. Douglas. They then returned to Forrester's, and all the party concerned and implicated went before a magistrate, when their voluntary statements and depositions were written down by the clerk from their own mouths, duly signed and attested in his presence; and he expressed a hope that the originator of this nefarious plot might be brought to justice. "I must now beg, sir," replied Beauchamp, "for a warrant to apprehend this scoundrel, Mangle, and bring him before you to-morrow," which being granted, and placed in the officer's hands, the party then separated; Beauchamp having told

Mrs. Douglas he should call upon her the next day.

From the statement of Mrs. Douglas, it appeared that Mangle first suggested the scheme of altering her marriage certificate and setting up some young man for her son; and that she then named her nephew as being exactly of the proper age. The alteration in the date of the year was made by the lawyer himself in her presence; and she was warned by that worthy to swear through thick and thin to her story, which she was fully prepared to do. Beauchamp, therefore, thought it prudent, in the absence of other evidence, to make use of this bad woman and her nephew to prove the case against the chief conspirator, Mangle, who held possession of the certificate; but the fraud being now clearly established by her own voluntary statement, and her nephew disproved, by his own father and mother, to be her son, he had no wish to proceed further, being most anxious to return to the country, although still considering it his duty to bring the greatest rogue of the party to condign punishment.

Having cautioned Monkton to take care of his son, and promising that young scamp that

if he would remain at home and conduct himself steadily, he should be provided with some suitable employment, Beauchamp returned with Malcolm and Lord Henry to their club, where he wrote a note, with an order on his banker for ten thousand pounds, and handing it to Lord Henry, expressed his thanks for his ready wit in so quickly exposing the tricks of their opponents.

"Come, come, Beauchamp," exclaimed Malcolm, on seeing the amount, "only half of this is your share—the other belongs to me."

"We can settle that another day, Malcolm, as I have no time now to write another draft—so come along, or I must leave you;" and, shaking hands with Lord Henry, he put on his hat and left the room.

CHAPTER XVII.

The delight of Blanche on hearing from her lover that her rights were now completely re-established, may be easily imagined, when Malcolm said, "Ay, ay, Blanche, this is all right, and very capital news; but Beauchamp has not informed you that it has cost him ten thousand pounds;" and he then told her of their agreement with Lord Henry, and his having paid the whole instead of his proper share.

"I would willingly have given as much more," replied Beauchamp, "to relieve my dear Blanche of her apprehensions; and now the matter is settled, Malcolm, I beg you will never allude to it again, as it ought to have been private between us."

"So it would, Beauchamp, had you not served me the trick you did, by paying all; but I will be even with you, old fellow."

"My dear, generous William," exclaimed Blanche, "how can I ever repay you for all your kind, affectionate anxiety on my behalf?"

"Easily enough, my love," he replied; and, placing his arm round her waist, whispered, "By becoming my own dear Blanche on or before the first of August."

Her hand was placed in his, whilst a crimson hue suffused her face and forehead—but there was no reply.

"Well, Blanche," interposed Malcolm, "I guess what the reward is to be—but Beauchamp is not so very generous, after all; and I think he has made a capital bargain by paying ten thousand pounds for ten thousand a-year; this is quite *à la Harcourt;* and you may depend upon it, my love, Will Beauchamp is a long-headed, calculating fellow; and has got the blind side of you—stuff and nonsense about disinterested affection! He has been all the time looking to your money, my dear."

"Well, Charles, then I am most happy to find he has succeeded in getting it at last."

"And he will make ducks and drakes of it before you are married a couple of years."

"Ah, Charles, I don't regard your joking and bantering now," she replied, laughing; "neither will William; so good bye, Charley dear, as I must run and tell aunt Gordon this joyful news;" saying which, she tripped lightly from the drawing-room, like a second Hebe, radiant in smiles and beauty.

"By Jove!" cried Malcolm, "you are a lucky dog, Beauchamp, to have gained the love of that sweet, true-hearted girl, who is more like an angel than a woman."

"Indeed, Malcolm, I am most thankful for this inestimable blessing, and my life shall be devoted to her happiness."

"I don't doubt it, my dear fellow, for I believe you love her ten times more than your own self; and now let us dress for dinner."

The family party that evening was one of the happiest in London; and the gloom which had hung over Blanche Douglas being dispelled, her usual cheerfulness returned, which put the old Earl and Mrs. Gordon in high spirits.

"Ah, you naughty child," exclaimed the former, "you are rejoicing now that you are on

a par with my boy Will. I see it all, you proud girl."

"I am proud and pleased, my dear father, to have it in my power to bestow on him something which may compensate for the trouble he will have in taking care of me."

"No, no, child, you are thinking of the dash you will make in town next season as Lady Beauchamp, and drive my poor boy crazy with your flirtations; I read your purpose in those wicked eyes, Blanche, and am almost sorry you have recovered your fortune."

"It will be William's soon, my dear father, and if he chooses to bring me to London, I cannot prevent that; but I can prevent myself flirting."

"Then come here, child, I have a word to say for your ear alone;" and drawing Blanche close to him, he whispered, "If you ever do flirt, my dear girl, which Heaven forbid, you will certainly break your husband's heart, and your father's too."

"My dear, kind father," she replied, "never will I cause you or him one moment's uneasiness; and surely you do not think me capable of acting so disgracefully."

"No, no, my precious child; so now give me a kiss, and sing me my favourite old song of 'Home, sweet home,' where, please God, we will be again by the end of this week."

The next morning, the Bow Street officer called in Grosvenor Square about twelve o'clock, and informed Beauchamp that he believed Mangle had *cut and run*. "He never went to his office yesterday, my Lord, and the woman at Monkton's lodging told me he was in a desperate way when the name of Lord Henry was mentioned, and jumping into a cab, he drove back to his own house. There also I could hear nothing more than that he had left early yesterday morning for his office. The door being thrown open, I thought it best not to search the house, or tell my errand, as I shall wait his return; but my impression is that he bolted the moment he heard young Monkton was nabbed, knowing he would squeak directly he was pinched."

Having handsomely rewarded the officer for his trouble, and given him his address in the country, Beauchamp sought Blanche to consult her about Mrs. Douglas. "I do not like the mother at all," he said, "she is a bold, impu-

dent woman ; but the two daughters are genteel-looking, handsome girls, with the Douglas features, and being your uncle's children, I suggest setting them up in some business together as milliners, or allowing their mother three hundred a year to maintain them until they marry, when I will give each a good marriage portion, if they form respectable connexions."

"Your proposal is very liberal, dear William, and you will of course take this money from my income."

"We will talk of that another day, my dear girl, as I have only consulted you now to know if you approve my plans ; and as we have nothing to detain us in London, my father and myself intend leaving the day after to-morrow ; and I need not say what pleasure it would give us both, if Aunt Gordon and yourself will travel with us ; the two couples that are to be can occupy one carriage, and aunty and the governor the other, which will afford our venerable Earl an opportunity of popping the question—only fancy aunty Countess of Annandale."

"Oh, William, how can you be so silly ?"

"Silly, you stupid child ! *you* are silly not

to perceive the unmistakable signs of the governor's *penchant*, which I have particularly noticed for the last six months; the fire has been smouldering for some time, and you will soon see it burst forth into a flame; so now *we* have had our spell of love-making, we will give them an opportunity of playing the same game; but not a word or hint to aunty, Blanche—leave all the arrangements to me; only go now and prepare her for leaving, whilst I drive down to Islington, and to-morrow I will take you with me to do a little shopping by ourselves."

Beauchamp gave Mrs. Douglas a severe lecture for her past infamous conduct, and then explained his intentions towards herself and children, for which she expressed her grateful thanks.

"It will now," he said, "depend on your future conduct whether you receive any further assistance from Miss Douglas and myself;" and desiring then to see her daughters, he told them also the allowance he had made their mother for their joint benefit, and his promise of a marriage portion to each; "but bear in mind, young ladies," he continued, "I do not wish you to 'marry in haste and repent at leisure,' merely for the sake of the money, which I intend shall

be yours, whether you marry or not, at the expiration of two years from this time; and if I hear a good account of you, that sum may be increased." Then, placing twenty pounds in the hand of each, with a handsome present to the mother, Beauchamp withdrew.

He was followed down stairs by the younger girl, Margaret, who, on opening the street door, said, "Will you tell me where you live, Lord Beauchamp?"

"Why do you wish to know?" was the enquiry.

"That I may write you those thanks which I cannot now express—indeed, my Lord, I feel most grateful for your great kindness, which has saved us from misery and disgrace."

"Your name is——"

"Margaret," she replied.

"There then, Margaret, is my card and address; write me your thoughts, not your thanks —the latter I can dispense with."

"Oh, thank you, my Lord," she replied, raising her eyes, glistening with tears, to his. There was so much in that appealing look which reminded Beauchamp so forcibly of his own dear

Blanche, that he said, in his soothing tones, "Are you not happy here, my poor girl?"

She burst instantly into tears, but made no reply.

"Come, Margaret, suppress your sobs; I will call for you to-morrow at eleven o'clock, so be ready for me, and I will take you a drive where you can tell me your wishes—but stay, I will let your mother know my intentions;" and running up stairs, he asked her permission to take Margaret with him the next day to see a lady, who, he thought, might be of service to her. This was readily granted, and Beauchamp, finding Margaret still below, bid her cheer up, and shaking hands with her, jumped into his cab, and drove back to Grosvenor Square, where, the moment his knock was heard at the door, Blanche ran down to meet him in the hall. Taking her into the morning room, he said, "Ah, Blanche, I have been making a fool of myself, I believe; but you know my soft heart is always dragging me into scrapes, and a woman's tears knock me over at once." He then related what had passed between him and Margaret.

"Dear William," she replied, "how can I blame you? perhaps this poor girl is very mise-

rable with such a mother, and I will consult with aunt Gordon what we can do with her ; so pray bring her here at any rate, and we can see her in this room without aunt Malcolm knowing anything about her."

Whatever Beauchamp said or did, being almost certain to obtain Mrs. Gordon's approval, she expressed great sympathy in the cause of this unhappy girl, and agreed to take her as companion, if she realized Beauchamp's expectations, and really wished to leave her home.

" There, aunty dear," said Beauchamp, " you are more soft-hearted than myself; but she has such a look of Blanche, that I am sure you will take a fancy to her directly."

" Well, my dear boy, when you take Blanche from me, which I suppose will be the case very soon, I shall be left quite alone, and this poor girl may be some comfort to me, as well as a help in my old age."

" My dearest, kindest friend," replied Beauchamp, pressing her hand in his, " you will never be left long alone by your dear children, as you call us; for you must either be with us, or we with you—so don't, my dear aunt, think of taking this girl on that account."

"Well, well, William, then I can have her for a month or two occasionally—so let me see her to-morrow morning."

It is almost needless to add that, from Mrs. Gordon being already prepossessed in her favour, Margaret was received very kindly by that lady and Blanche; and after a long conversation about family matters, in which, with good taste and feeling, she spoke as little as necessary of her mother's character and conduct, sufficient transpired to induce Mrs. Gordon to take her as companion; and she accordingly gave her directions how to reach the Priory, with money to pay her expenses by coach, the beginning of the following week. Nothing could exceed the delight of the poor girl at this arrangement, who, it appeared, was very unhappy with her mother and sister, from causes which it is unnecessary to mention. Beauchamp, after her interview with Mrs. Gordon, escorted Margaret to a cab; and having received her grateful thanks for his extreme kindness, gave directions to the driver where to go, and returned, according to his promise, to take Blanche for a walk. The first shop they entered was Turner's, the jeweller, where Beauchamp had ordered a pair of bracelets,

set with precious stones, of great value, with a beautiful necklace to correspond.

"There, Blanche," he whispered, "is a little wedding present, which you must accept at my hands, unless you prefer something else."

"Indeed, William," she replied, "I have quite sufficient jewelry already; and do not like putting you to greater expense on my account, after the immense sum you have paid Lord Henry."

"I have ordered these purposely for you, dear girl, and you will seriously offend me by refusing them;—they are fetters for your hands, and a chain for your neck, by which I shall bind you in cruel bondage to me for ever. Now, Blanche, there is one other purchase I must make, of unspeakable value to me, though of little value in itself—a plain ring for your finger, which I shall keep until a certain auspicious morning."

And Beauchamp, desiring a tray of rings to be brought and laid on the counter, told the foreman to leave them for their inspection, whilst he attended to his other customers.

"Now, my dear girl, take off your left-hand glove, and try one of these on your third finger."

Blanche blushed deeply, and her hand trembled, so, that Beauchamp tried the rings for her;

and selecting the one which fitted her best, said softly—"Why do you tremble thus, my own dearest love? Do you repent your choice?"

"Oh, no, no, William, never can I do that—but I am rather nervous this morning."

"Then look at those jewels further down, my love, whilst I have these things put up," which being done, he returned to her. "Now, Blanche, which of those trinkets would suit dear aunty best—for I must and will make her a present worth her acceptance."

"I fear she will think us both very extravagant children, William, and lecture us, instead of receiving a present; but I was just thinking of buying those bracelets (pointing them out) for her."

"Then I shall take that trouble off your hands, Blanche, and you shall give her this brooch instead; but you need not now pay for it, as Mr. Turner has my name on his books, and I have desired him to send in my account, with these articles included."

Blanche remonstrated, but in vain; when Beauchamp, taking up the two cases containing the brooch and ring, desired the other things might be sent to Grosvenor Square by six o'clock at the latest that evening.

CHAPTER XVIII.

The next morning, after an early breakfast, as Beauchamp and Blanche, equipped in travelling costume, were looking out of the window of Lady Malcolm's house, a handsome barouche, with postilions gaily dressed in jackets of the Beauchamp livery, and four beautiful bay horses, drove up to the door.

"Why, William," exclaimed Blanche, in surprise, "whose is that gay equipage?"

"Yours, my dear girl—the carriage and horses I have bought expressly for your use."

She raised her eyes, filled with tears, to his, with a look of grateful affection, without speaking—deep emotion preventing her

utterance, when they were interrupted by Malcolm's entering the room. "Is that your smart turn-out, Beauchamp?"

"No, Malcolm," was the quiet reply, with a smile.

"The lads have your uniform, my boy, at any rate; but," looking at Blanche, "oh, I see—they are my Lady Beauchamp's. By Jove! old fellow, you have got the start of me, as usual, doing things in your silent mysterious way. I have ordered a carriage for Constance, also; but it won't be finished this fortnight. Where did you get yours?"

"At Houlditch's; it was built for a gentleman, who was obliged unexpectedly to leave England, and I took it off his hands."

"And the bays?"

"Picked them up here and there about town."

"Egad! they are fine, slashing, well-bred looking animals, fit for hunting."

"Yes, Malcolm, I looked them over, and have had them tried several times together in harness, and am satisfied they are quiet and good tempered, and you will see presently they can go a pretty good pace, when we are clear of London."

"Really, Blanche, Beauchamp is resolved, I see, that you shall do things in style, and if you have not been a spoilt child, there is every prospect of your being a spoilt wife, my love. But here comes the other carriage for the old pair; so now let us be off, as I have taken leave of my mother, who has not yet left her room, but has promised to join us at the Priory, within the month."

Constance now appeared, saying her father and aunt Gordon were ready and waiting below.

"Well, Malcolm," said the old Peer, "what do you think of Will taking us all by surprise with that smart equipage for Blanche, and not to tell even his old father what he was about?"

"Just like him, my dear Governor—always doing things on the sly."

"And always thinking of those he loves, before himself," added Mrs. Gordon.

"Now then, Will, off with your party," cried his father, "whilst Mrs. Gordon and myself bring up the rear."

In ten minutes the four bays were trotting majestically through Hyde Park, making light of the barouche which followed at their heels; and the four happy occupants of its inside seats,

whose cheerful voices and beaming smiles betokened their joy of being once more "homeward bound." No two school-boys could be in higher spirits than Malcolm and Beauchamp; nor were Constance and Blanche less happy at their emancipation from the thraldom of town life.

"Now then," cried Malcolm, when they had left the streets behind them, "let us see what Blanche's bays can do—put them along, Beauchamp."

"Pray don't let them go too fast, William," she cried, as he rose to speak to the postilions, "pray don't, to oblige me."

"Well, my love, then they shall only canter up the next rising ground, to show Malcolm how they can go together," which direction was given; but when once put on their mettle, the horses increased their speed to a full gallop and raced away for a couple of miles, in spite of every effort to stop them. "Hurrah!" exclaimed Malcolm, "now we go Leger pace, by jingo! Blanche, they can gallop a few."

"Oh, William," cried both the girls at once, now seriously alarmed, "pray stop them, or we shall be dashed to pieces."

"Sooner said than done, my dears," said

Malcolm; "but sit still, or you will be thrown out, you two silly girls."

Beauchamp, occupying the front seat with Blanche, and seeing the boys straining in vain to pull up their horses, shouted out, "Steady, my lads, let them go, but hold their heads near together, and sit firm in your seats."

To Beauchamp's horror, they were now rapidly approaching a broad-wheeled waggon occupying the centre of the road, with its jingling bells, and no appearance of a driver, who was, he concluded, as usual, half asleep inside. Destruction to them all seemed almost inevitable, and he turned deadly pale, when a sudden thought struck him. He had a new hunting-horn in the pocket of the carriage, which had been sent home from Percival's that morning, just before he left Grosvenor Square, which instantly seizing, he sent forth a blast so shrill and loud, that it penetrated the waggoner's dull ear amidst his din of bells, and the heavy vehicle was seen turning slowly aside. Still there seemed scarcely a chance of its giving room to pass before the leaders would be even with its hind wheels, and Beauchamp, fearing the crisis was at hand, and telling Malcolm to

do the same to Constance, seized Blanche firmly with his right arm round the waist, taking tight hold of the handle of the carriage door with his left. The act was instantaneous, and as they passed the heavy lumbering machine, the exclamation escaped him, "Thank God! we are saved." Blanche neither moved nor spoke, overcome by Beauchamp's manner and the dread of some imminent peril.

"Now, my love," he whispered, "we have escaped the danger, sit firm a few minutes longer, and I will soon stop your fiery bays." They were already beginning to slacken their pace a little, which was evident to Beauchamp's quick eye, their heads being raised, and their ears becoming erect, when raising his voice he shouted out, "hold hard!"—in a moment their speed diminished—"hold hard!" again cried Beauchamp, "you runaway brutes! hold hard!" These words seemed magical—The race was over; and all four horses stood still.

"Let them stand till I get out, my lads," Beauchamp cried. He then folded Blanche in his arms, who burst into tears.

"Come, come, my dear girl, it is all over now, and we will have no more galloping to day."

Malcolm, warned by Beauchamp, and following his example, had held Constance tight round the waist as they were passing the waggon, and his face became ghastly pale, with a shuddering sensation, as the wheels just grazed each other; but when the danger was over, his levity quickly returned.

"By Jeremy Diddler! that was an uncommon near shave—just half an inch, and—oh! my, as Mrs. Winter has it—what an *hexposé* we should have made—all legs and wings sprawling in the road, like two couples of untrussed chickens."

"For shame, Charles," exclaimed Constance, "to make a joke of such a serious matter, when our lives might have been lost through your frolic."

"Well then, my dear, you and Blanche can do a little *à la Niobe*, whilst I and Beauchamp look over the nags."

"Why, Tom, you young villain!" cried Malcolm, addressing the first lad, who was no other than Lord Henry's late tiger, "how dare you spring them along at that furious rate, frightening the ladies almost into fits."

"Couldn't help it, my Lord, they would go;

and if master hadn't thought of 'hold hard!' they wouldn't 'a stopped till we got to Hounslow."

Beauchamp, the while, was patting the horses' necks, and speaking to them in his *horse* language, which soothed their excited tempers; and having carefully looked over the harness and carriage, to see there was nothing out of place, he gave orders to the postilions not to break again out of a trot, and resumed his seat by the side of Blanche, who looked very grave, if not offended.

"Are you angry with me," he asked, "because the horses ran away?"

"I have been very much frightened, William, by the awful position in which we were placed, and you have shown very little consideration for my feelings, when I entreated you not to allow the horses to go so fast."

"I merely thought of giving them a canter against the hill, dear girl, and am fully sensible now of my excessive folly in rousing the spirits of four thorough-bred horses; but my agony of mind on passing that waggon, words cannot describe. Had an accident occurred, I never could have forgiven myself that boyish freak.

Even now, the thought of it makes me shudder, and it will be a lesson to me as long as I live. I do not ask your forgiveness, Blanche, for I do not deserve it;" and he turned round, leaning over the front, to order the lads to go slower. Blanche turned also towards the horses, and placing her hand on his arm, said affectionately, "I am not angry with you, dear William, only I felt hurt at your disregarding my wishes; but give me your hand, and let us say no more on the subject."

"Ay, ay," cried Malcolm, "that's the plan, Blanche; begin with him early, my love, and let him know at once that the grey mare is more than a match for the four bays. Egad! Beauchamp, I never saw a fellow knock under so quickly as you do; if Con was to lecture me for a spree of that sort, I would set them going again like mad; and now, I suppose, seven miles an hour is to be our pace for the remainder of the day."

"Not so, Malcolm, when we have posters, of whose running away there is little danger. Rather, however, than frighten Blanche again, I would be two days on the journey, instead of one;

but if our pace does not suit you, you and Constance can join the governor, and let us have aunt Gordon."

"And not a bad move either, with two such slow coaches as yourself and Blanche," replied Malcolm. "Egad, old fellow! that girl will soon make a regular Molly Coddle of you; and as for hunting, riding over five-barred gates and double ditches, after you are married, don't again think of such dangerous exploits; but if my timid little cousin had accepted Danby or Ayrshire, she would have been bowled along thirty miles an hour, *malgré* her tears and entreaties, which they would only have laughed at."

"I never would have accepted either, Charles, which you know very well," replied Blanche, indignantly.

"Lucky for you you did not, my love, as no one would have suited you but this soft-hearted fellow, Beauchamp, who is ever giving in to your whims and fancies."

"And ever will, Malcolm, when they are not unreasonable," added Beauchamp; "so a truce to further badinage. Blanche shall do as she likes with her own."

"And that means you, as well as her horses, old fellow."

"Exactly so, Malcolm," was the good-humoured reply, which restored the party to their usual cheerfulness; and after changing horses at Hounslow, they again set forth on their journey, and halted not on the road until they reached Newbury, where Beauchamp, seeing some beautiful trout, ordered them for an early dinner, and waited for his father and Mrs. Gordon, a stroll being proposed in the meantime.

On returning to the inn, after a short walk, they found the venerable Earl with his companion, both of whom inflicted a sharp lecture on Beauchamp and Malcolm for leaving them so far behind.

"No help for it, governor," said Malcolm, "those fiery bays of Lady Beauchamp's ran away with us, and very nearly capsized the whole lot into a broad-wheeled waggon—just the nearest thing imaginable, half an inch more, and—oh my, what a scrimmage!"

"I will engage, Charles, you had something to do with it," replied Mrs. Gordon.

"Just the smallest, littlest finger in the pie;

only, this time, aunty dear — merely asked Beauchamp to put them out a wee bittie to try their paces, and off we went at Derby speed.

'Away, away, our steeds and we,
Upon the pinions of the wind,
All human dwellings left behind ;
We sped like meteors through the sky,'
Until Will Beauchamp raised a cry,
And checked our coursers, fast and furious,
Which made Miss Douglas look quite curious."

"Charles, you are quite incorrigible" exclaimed Mrs. Gordon, "always engaged in some mischief or freak, like a schoolboy."

"Only in a little recreation to-day, dear aunt; it was very hot, and the ladies wanted fanning, for which I have been already punished by being sent to Coventry by my Lady Beauchamp, who has scarcely spoken to me since this untoward event occurred. But now," ringing the bell, "for these Kennet trout, with which, I suppose, we must order some Kennet ale to wash them down. Dinner, waiter, instanter," as that person appeared.

"Yes, sir—my Lord—I beg pardon."

"Drop my Lord, and bring the trout."

"Soup, my Lord ?"

"No sir—fill the tureen with Kennet ale."

"What wines, my Lord?"

"Champagne, hock, hermitage, sauterne, moselle—half-a-dozen of each—quick—presto—begone!"

"Beg pardon, my Lord," said the waiter, "but I'm afraid we havn't all them wines in the cellar?"

"Avaunt! fiend—begone!" cried Malcolm with a theatrical air—"What! will you make a younker of me?—shall I not take mine ease in mine Inn, but I shall have my pocket picked?—Shakespeare—ahem!"

The waiter, with a stare of astonishment, instantly disappeared from the room, telling the landlady that one of the gentlemen was either mad, or a London play actor.

"Hah, hah!" laughed Malcolm's valet, "that's my lord and master, I'll swear—always cracking his jokes with everybody he meets."

The trout were quickly placed on the table, with a couple of bottles of champagne and ditto of hock, which being discussed by the hungry party, a cold fore-quarter of lamb succeeded, with a dish of veal cutlets and broiled ham, then pastry of various kinds, to conclude with

an old Wiltshire cheese, salad, and Kennet ale, to which the gentlemen did ample justice.

"Well, aunty," asked Malcolm, "don't you feel all the better for this bit of a refresher? that Kennet ale slips down beautifully, and I feel like the little boy after eating more than quantum suff. of plum pudding, as if my jacket was buttoned."

"When will you cease to be a boy, Charles?"

"Never, aunty dear, until I am buckled up, when, according to the old song,

> 'Needles and pins—needles and pins,
> When a man marries, his trouble begins.'

But, my gracious" (as the waiter brought in a basket of live cray fish, ordered by Beauchamp), "here's another little present for Lady Beauchamp. Come, my love," to Blanche, "just look at these pretty little creatures, so lively and sportive; just touch them my dear, so nice, and cool;" and putting her hand in the basket, she was seized by the finger, which caused more than an exclamation of surprise—on which Malcolm rushed from the room, and did not appear again until the carriages stood at the door.

"Has it hurt you much, dear girl?" asked

Beauchamp, jumping up from his chair and running to her rescue.

"Oh no, William, it only pinched my finger rather hard."

"Really it is too bad of Malcolm, with such practical jokes," (seeing her finger bleeding) "which I will not put up with."

"Pray don't be angry with him, William," she pleaded, "it was my own fault, for being so silly as to put my hand in the basket."

"Now, ladies and gemmen," said Malcolm, peeping in at the door and touching his hat, "time's up, and the coach is awaiting."

"Ah, you young scamp!" shouted the old earl, "I'll double-thong you, when I catch you at Bampton, for serving Blanche that trick."

"She wouldn't open her mouth to me, daddy dear, so I wished to know if she had lost her voice; but she spoke quick enough to the cray-fish when *he* asked her a question—Did he bite very sharp, my love?" he inquired, in a pitying tone, of Blanche.

"So sharp, Charles, that he made my finger bleed."

"Did he indeed, dear girl? I beg a thousand

pardons for my foolery, as I thought they could only squeeze a little."

Malcolm having feelingly expressed contrition for his offence, which was readily forgiven, their seats were resumed in the carriage as before, until the last stage on the road, where Malcolm and Blanche joined Mrs. Gordon for the Priory, and the old earl drove off with his son and daughter to Bampton.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE following morning, very early, Blanche was in the full enjoyment of the flower-garden ; buoyant in spirits, light at heart, and as perfectly happy as it is possible for any human being to be. Soon after breakfast, Beauchamp rode over to see his beloved, with whom he spent the day. How different were his feelings now to the last time he had wandered through the grounds of the Priory, accompanied by Blanche Douglas. Then with the feverish, restless anxiety about her first entrance on a new sphere of life, and the dreaded influence of the world on her guileless unsuspecting mind. The ordeal had now been passed—temptation resisted, and

her constancy to him proved beyond doubt or cavil. Beauchamp had cause to be proud of all this. He was not proud, however, but thankful—deeply thankful to that Almighty Power, by whose grace and protection she had been preserved from falling into those errors and follies by which so many young girls are influenced.

They were sitting now in the old arbour during the heat of the day—Blanche reclining on a rustic chair, whilst these thoughts were passing through Beauchamp's mind. He was silent for a few moments, which she noticed: "Of what are you thinking, dear William?" Still there was no reply.

"Will you not tell me?" she inquired. "what has caused this sudden thoughtfulness? Surely, I may now share in all your cares, as well as pleasures. Tell me, then, my own dear William, what has made you look so serious."

"I was thinking, my dearest girl, of that deep debt of gratitude I owe to God for the ineffable and undeserved happiness I now enjoy in having you restored to me again, unaffected and uncontaminated by the world, as when we last sat together here; and a thought crossed my mind,

to pour out my thanks to our merciful Father for this blessing, on this very spot, where we last parted in sorrow and sadness, and now meet in joy."

"Your thoughts are mine also, dear William," she replied, rising and placing her hand in his; —"let me kneel by your side."

Happy they who, like Blanche and Beauchamp, "remember now THEIR Creator in the days of *their* youth"—who acknowledge with thankfulness (despising the sneers and sarcasms of the worldly-minded) that source from which all true blessings flow; and as they set out to thread this devious earthly path below, keep steadfastly in view the home to which it leads.—Who does not join in that prayer of Balaam? "Oh, may I die the death of the righteous, and may my latter end be like his." But how few bear in mind that to die the death, they must also live the life of the righteous. Tell men of an Australian land, where gold, silver, diamonds, and precious stones abound, even with hard toil and trouble to be acquired;—see the eagerness with which they listen—the increasing anxiety displayed in searching out every particular concerning this earthly paradise. Tell them of another far *better*,

more glorious land, to which all the countries of the earth are in comparison like a stagnant pool of water to the ocean—tell them of a city whose walls are built of jasper, and her streets paved with gold; whose buildings glitter with rubies, amethysts, and pearls—tell them of a second Eden, where man shall regain his lost innocence and dignity—tell them of a newly-created world, in which all animal and vegetable nature shall far surpass in magnitude and magnificence what we behold here below; where God himself shall reign as king, with angels for his ministers; whence death, and pain, and sorrow are for ever banished, and the lion shall lie down with the lamb—tell them this land, with all its happiness and joys unspeakable, may be—nay, must be theirs, if they seek, as they would the hidden treasures of this, with diligence and care;—and what will they say in return? "Go thy way for this time; when I have a convenient season, I will call for thee." Oh, fools!—with all your worldly wisdom, blind, besotted fools! who barter a few quickly passing years, with all their short-lived, unsatisfactory pleasures and enjoyments, for eternity!

As Blanche and Beauchamp were kneeling

side by side, pouring out their thanks to their Maker, and imploring his protection and blessing through their wedded life, Mrs. Gordon, unperceived, passed noiselessly by, and the devout aspiration of Jabez escaped her lips, "Oh, that Thou would'st bless *them* indeed!"

* * * * * *

A month has passed—it is the first of August, a bright and lovely morning. Again are Lord Beauchamp and Blanche kneeling side by side, the latter never more to rise as Blanche Douglas. She is kneeling at the altar, with her hand in his, whose cherished name she now bears, as the wife of William Beauchamp. The village church of Bampton is thronged with spectators, rich and poor, to witness the double marriage of Beauchamp and his sister. Lord Malcolm looked serious enough during the ceremony; but his love for teasing Blanche would break forth directly after, when he whispered, "The *Gordon* knot, my love, is tied at last, which dear aunty has been so long in weaving."

"And most thankful am I, Charles, to Heaven," she replied; "and to that dear aunt for such a blessing."

There was not a vacant pew that morning in

Bampton Church. For miles around, the farmers, with their wives and daughters, flocked to the scene to witness the marriage of their favourite (whom they still persisted in calling "the young squire") and his sister; and when the two couples issued from the sacred portals, amid a peal of bells pulled by right vigorous arms, a line was formed by the congregation from the porch to the church-yard gate; and one long, loud cheer burst forth, as they passed along, from all assembled.

A grand breakfast was prepared at Bampton, to which all the neighbouring gentry had been invited, to conclude with a farmers' ball in the evening; at which some of the higher orders wished to be present also. Neither were the poor forgotten—tents being erected on the lawn for the whole population of Bampton parish, with the substantial fare of roast beef and plum pudding, supplied by the two principal innkeepers of the village, to which they sat down at two o'clock. Rustic games and pastimes succeeded, with dancing on the greensward in the evening.

The two newly-married couples, having changed their bridal attire for travelling costume, drove off immediately afterwards *en route* to the north;

Lord Beauchamp and Blanche for Annandale Castle, and Malcolm and Constance for his seat in Scotland. The bitterness of parting with his only daughter was considerably mollified to the old Earl by the promise of their returning at the end of a month or six weeks to spend the winter at Bampton; and Mrs. Gordon felt too happy in the attainment of all her wishes, to think so deeply as she otherwise would of the temporary separation from her affectionate niece and newly-made nephew, both of whom she loved as her own children. Her sister, Lady Malcolm, also, was now staying at the Priory, with Mrs. Fortescue, who accompanied her from town, where she intended to remain until the first week in September, by which time Beauchamp and Blanche were expected home again.

Bob Conyers, with his usual disinterestedness, to prevent his old friend feeling solitary after his children's departure, had invited himself to spend a week at Bampton; and for the present there was no lack of guests, Lord Henry Bayntun, Sir William Burnet, Gwynne, and Melville having come expressly for the occasion. Fred Beauchamp was there also, who, in his son's absence, was of great service, as well as

comfort, to the old Earl. Lady Malcolm and Mrs. Gordon, with the gay widow, having been invited to spend the day at Bampton, took a lively interest in all the proceedings in honour of their niece's marriage; and, accompanied by the Earl, Bob Conyers, and Fred Beauchamp, visited all the tents in succession at the dinner hour, to see the arrangements made to regale so large a company, and were not less amused than gratified by the cordial meeting between the founder of the feast and some of his aged parishioners.

"Ah, Squire," said an old man, nearly bent double by years and infirmities, "I never thought as how I should live to see the loike of this, but there—what's the dame want?"—(as an elderly female whispered in his ear)—"she do say, Squire, as I be to call you my Lord—but it don't seem natural loike. I've ha' know'd ye as Squire Beauchamp handy sixty years, and I be used to the name—so doant ye take it amiss, as I do love the old Squire, and the young 'un too. God bless 'un, and prosper 'un, with that angel, Miss Blanche."

"Hark ye, Job," replied the Earl, "if you ever dare to my Lord me, I shall think you an

arrant old hypocrite, so sit down and go to work with your knife and fork."

Mrs. Gordon, who was known to all the neighbouring poor for her benevolent and charitable disposition, was deservedly beloved by them, entering into their joys and sorrows with the most unaffected and truly Christian feeling, and she had ever a kind word to say, as well as a kind look to bestow, on the poor and humble, in addition to more substantial proofs of sympathy. In their drives about the country, Mrs. Gordon's and Blanche's visits were not restricted to their rich acquaintances, and in their rambles nearer home, their footsteps were constantly directed to the lowly cottages of the poor, to console them in their afflictions and minister to their wants. On this occasion, Mark Rosier was appointed master of the ceremonies, to superintend the whole proceedings and preserve order; and the office could not have devolved on one more zealously affected towards the House of Beauchamp. In fact, since the rescue of Blanche from Lord Vancourt's devices, Mark had become rapidly a man of consequence, and was now under-steward on the Bampton estates, with a

salary commensurate with his fidelity and honesty. His father was also once more in a flourishing condition as a farmer.

"Really, Mark," exclaimed Mrs. Gordon, "I hardly knew you again, you look more like a gentleman than a——"

"Poacher, you would have said, my lady," added Mark, good humouredly; "but if I have got good clothes on my back now, my dearly-respected lady, Mark Rosier is not the man to forget who put them there."

"Indeed, Mark, I meant no unkind reflection on yourself, and rejoice most truly in your good fortune."

"Ah, my lady! times are altered to me indeed; but far beyond all the money, I value the confidence placed in me by my dear young master, who seems to think he can never repay me for a little bit of service I once did, which was nothing particular, after all."

"To us all, Mark, it was a very particular piece of service, for had you not detected that detestable plot, none of us had now been present at these rejoicings, and sorrow instead of happiness had filled our hearts. You are well chosen, my faithful friend, to preside on this

auspicious occasion, and as long as life is spared us, we shall never forget our gratitude for your gallant conduct."

"And mind, Mark," interposed Fred, "these good people don't get tipsy to night."

"Then, Master Fred, you must come and help me keep the tap, as I suspect, whether I will or no—(with a sly wink at Fred)—it'll be a very wet arternoon."

"Indeed, I hope not," said Mrs. Gordon; "I should be sorry these poor people were deprived of their day's amusement."

"There ain't any fear of its being wet overhead, my Lady; but then you know it is very hot weather, and there be a number of thirsty souls here to-day. Then there 'll be Lord and Lady Beauchamp's health to drink—Lord and Lady Malcolm's—my Lord's, in course—and your ladyship's, and a few others, with bumpers all round, and I raythor think some of these good folk will feel werry moist indeed before nightfall."

Leaving our happy rustics to the full enjoyment of their festival, which did not terminate until darkness stole over the scene, which, as

might be expected, had long previously stolen over the senses of many of the guests, so as to render them oblivious of time and their road home, we will now transfer our reader to the ball room at Bampton House, which was crowded to overflowing with the bold yeomen, their wives and daughters, and a fair sprinkling of gentility. Of the latter were Sir Lionel Markham and family, the Comptons, Rollestons, all the bachelors of the hunt, with Mr. and Mrs. Winterbottom, who had particularly begged to be present. The Earl opened the ball in a country dance with Mrs. Styles, a fine buxom-looking woman of fifty. The other gentlemen selected partners also among the farmers' wives and daughters, this being the rule to be observed in the first dance.

Selina Markham seized upon young Hazel for her partner; and Fred Beauchamp introduced Mrs. Fortescue to the brother of Miss Fairacre, the prettiest girl in the room, whom he had engaged for himself. Bob Conyers, undertaking the part of Master of the Ceremonies, soon provided for all the dancing youngsters by mutual introductions. Captain Markham, who was playing fierce attention to Miss Honoria, voted

it "a demmed bore" to be pulled nearly off his legs by a strong young damsel, through every couple, down to the bottom of the room. "I say, Fred," he whispered, when left at ease for a few seconds, "I shan't have any more of this fun—don't pay, old fellow—just see my Phillis, a full blown peony's a fool to her—demmit! makes one hot to look at her—heavy in hand as a four-year old. Cut and run, by Jove, Fred."

"Can't be done, Markham — orders from head quarters for one dance with the rustics; then please ourselves afterwards. So here we go at it again—cross hands, down the middle and up again," with which the Captain was whirled away by his Amazonian partner. On crossing hands with his sister, she asked, "Cool and comfortable, Ned, eh?"

"Demmed uncomfortable, Selina; but you don't catch me doing drill work of this sort again;" immediately after, his partner making a false step, could not recover her equilibrium, and holding the Captain tight in hand, dragged him down with her, giving him a rattling fall, Fred and his partner rolling over him.

"My gracious!" exclaimed Selina, "the life

guardsman floored at last! quick, Hazel, pick him up, or he'll be smothered by that Amazon, who is as heavy as a sack of grains. Oh, me! what will Miss Honoria say to her darling Captain being smashed in that fashion?"

Both Hazel and Fred Beauchamp laughed so immoderately as to be incapable of rendering any assistance, for the Captain's leg being crooked under him, his ancle was severely sprained, so that he could with difficulty raise himself; but Conyers hastened to assist him, enquiring where he was injured.

"Eh! aw! Bob, queer about the ancle—pains fearfully; give me your arm, old fellow; hobble away to a chair—deuced awkward affair, floored by a woman! 'pon honour."

As the Captain limped across the room in search of a seat, Mrs. Winterbottom, pitying his distressed looks, with anguish pictured on his brow, rose from her most comfortable chair, and insisted on his taking possession of it.

"Oh, Captain dear, this comes o' romping in them nasty country dances—and there's my Honoria been nearly torn to bits by that young farmer-chap, whisking and whirling her about till she's not fit to be seen, with her hair all

about her face, and her dress rumpled and crumpled as if it had been taken out of a clothes bag; but here she comes—my gracious! such a figure, and so 'ot, poor thing;" and sure enough, Miss Honoria's dress and tresses were rather the worse for the rushing and crushing she had been obliged to undergo when hauled about by young Mr. Hardcastle, who was not one of the most graceful in his movements, or very particular about an extra hop or two, whether in or out of time.

With the proverbial unselfishness of women, however, Miss Honoria's first enquiring looks were directed to Markham, whose fall she had witnessed. "I fear," she said, "you have been very much injured by that awkward girl's falling?"

"Much better now, thank you," he replied, "pray take my seat," attempting to rise, when another sharp twinge made the Captain twist again.

"Sit still, Captain Markham, I beg and entreat."

"Pon honour, couldn't perpetrate such rudeness, as to sit still whilst you are standing, Miss Honoria."

"Then," she said, "I shall leave you directly, if you make another effort to rise."

At this moment, the earl (his dance being finished) came up to enquire about his accident. "Well, Markham, I see how it is, and rest is your only remedy—an easy chair here, or in the drawing-room,—which do you prefer?"

"Oh here, by all means," was the reply, "as I should like to see the fun out."

In a few minutes, a low chair was brought in for the Captain's especial use, with a footstool to rest his leg upon, and being engaged to Miss Honoria for the first quadrille, that young lady, in compassion to his misfortune, insisted on sitting with him during the dance. Now, on what exact terms it was effected, we are not at liberty to disclose; but certain it is that this little attention of the young lady, coupled with some melting looks from a pair of very beautiful black eyes, so softened the Captain's heart, that a declaration of love followed, and crimson cheeks, with down-cast looks, were the only answers returned, which the Captain took as intended.

The pressure of her hand, with a few *sotto voce* whisperings of love and devotion succeeded,

with a conclusion more *in alto*—"Eh! pon honour, how romantic, and all that sort of thing."

Selina, who had been casting searching glances towards the happy pair, felt assured, by the young lady's behaviour, that the die was cast. "Here, Bob," she exclaimed to her partner, "that fool, Ned, has fallen into the mash-tub at last, and I'll bet a pony, as Lord Henry says, that Miss Honoria has booked him. My gracious! what a row there will be, when mamma finds we are to have Mrs. Winter for a mother-in-law."

"Any way, my dear, her's is a better name than Hogsflesh, and I know Ned had serious ideas about a young lady of that name in London, this season, the daughter of a retired soap boiler. Honoria herself is very well, a pretty, unassuming, well-educated girl; and, I can tell you, a brewery is a very lucrative, safe investment, with large returns, and the business itself quite respectable; so on the whole, Ned has decided wisely, and we must put up with the old lady's vulgarities, if indeed she is disposed to trouble us with them, which I very much question."

"Ah! Bob, you are ever making the best of things."

"And so, my dear, I hope, you also, for the future, will look always on the sunny side, which is the wisest thing to do."

CHAPTER XX.

We must now turn our attention to Mrs. Fortescue and Fred Beauchamp, who were lounging (the latter at least) through a quadrille.

"What do you think," he was asking her, "of our country practices at a wedding? our rustic games and dances?"

"To me," she replied, "everything I have witnessed to-day has been most delightful. The dear old Earl's unaffected, almost parental kindness to his poor neighbours, and their joyous looks, beaming with gratitude, in return, awaken kindred feelings in my own heart, and recall the associations of my earlier years, when

I was a country girl; happy are they, indeed (if they would estimate truly that happiness), who live a country life, far removed from the bustle and turmoil of the city; and I can truly say—

"'From the court to the cottage convey me away,
For I'm weary of grandeur and what they call gay;
Where pride without measure,
And pomp without pleasure,
Make life in a circle of hurry decay.'

I'm tired to death of London dust and smoke—I have never seen a more united family than yours appears to be; and really have serious thoughts of taking some place in the neighbourhood, to be near your excellent uncle, with whom I confess to have fallen desperately in love."

"Well, then," said Fred, lowering his voice, "as you cannot be the earl's wife, will it content you to be his niece?"

For a moment she gazed steadfastly on her partner's face; and in the serious look which met her enquiring eyes, she read his meaning—but made no response.

"Have I offended you," he asked, in a quiet, subdued tone, "by my abrupt question?"

"No," she replied, as the colour rose to her very brow; "I will not pretend to misunderstand you, but"—

"Stay one moment, ere you pronounce my doom," he said, earnestly. "Remember your promise at Almacks, which I have pondered on ever since—how fondly and fatally, none will ever know; for I see my fate hangs on a thread, which one more word will sever. Oh, speak it not," he added; "and forgive my presumption in having ventured thus far."

"Frederick," she said, gently, "I will spare your feelings as much as I can, in justice to my own; but you must not misunderstand either my sentiments or my words. I like you as a friend and companion; but our acquaintance has been of very recent date, and I must see and know more of you, before I could entrust my happiness to your keeping."

"Then you will not at once discard me, as I dreaded," he murmured passionately. "A thousand thanks for that concession. I ask no more. I am now content."

"Thus let it be, then," she added. "But mind you are not too sanguine in your hopes—I see the Earl approaching."

"Well, Mrs. Fortescue," he inquired, "what do you think of our country lasses?"

"Indeed," she replied, "many of them are exceedingly pretty, genteel-looking girls; and so nicely dressed, with their hair arranged quite *à la mode*, that I should have thought some London milliner and hair-dresser had been engaged preparing them for the occasion."

"Oh!" he exclaimed, "you are not far from the truth, as Blanche and Constance's maids have been giving them some lessons on these matters, to set them off to the best advantage; but still, there is a natural gracefulness about some, which art cannot much improve—for instance, Fred's first partner, Miss Fairacre, who might pass muster even at Almack's—a crafty young scamp he is—always picking out the prettiest girl in the room. Take care of him, Mrs. Fortescue—he is a dangerous fellow, with those glossy curls—but not a bad boy at heart—(patting him on the back)—and I don't know what I could well do without him, sometimes. Well, Fred," addressing him, "I conclude you will be following Will's example pretty soon; and, mind, when you can find one like Blanche, in heart and disposition—fond of the country, and likely

to make me a dutiful, affectionate niece, you shall have the Grange, and all the appurtenances belonging thereto, for your home, and something, in addition to your own property, to help to keep house—on these conditions, you may marry with my consent; but I don't intend to trust you out of the parish."

"Many thanks, my dear uncle, for your generous offer. You have ever been to me as a father, and I hope never to be far distant from dear old Bampton, where I have spent so many happy years."

"It will be your own fault if you are, my boy —and don't forget your duties to-night, in seeing that our guests are well cared for."

"No fear of that, uncle. Bob and myself don't intend to be idle."

Neither were they, either before, at, or after supper. At twelve precisely, the large dining-room and library, joined together by wide folding doors, were thrown open, displaying a long table, reaching down the centre, and two cross tables at each end, on which a profusion of good things was spread out, with wines of every description; and, it were needless to remark that, the evening being very sultry, Conyers and Fred caused the cham-

pagne corks to pop about like irregular musket discharges of infantry. The company had fully discussed the merits of the good things provided for them, when Bob Conyers, as Vice-Chairman, proposed the toast of the evening in a short, appropriate speech—"Health and happiness to the two newly-married couples!" which was received with deafening cheers, lasting for several minutes; and as they were dying away, the stentorian voice of Farmer Stiles was heard: "Now, gentlemen, one cheer more, as you love him, for the young squire; and may God bless them both."

The shout which answered this short address may be imagined, and the Earl, seeing the ladies almost overpowered by the thunder of voices, rose to return thanks, which stilled immediately the raging storm into breathless silence. The short, energetic speech of the old Peer again elicited rounds of applause, although more subdued, from a hint passed up the long table by Conyers. "The Ladies'," and "The Earl's" health then followed in quick succession, after which dancing re-commenced, and continued with unabated strength and resolution until four o'clock in the morning.

With the termination of these festivities and

the departure of his guests from Bampton, the Earl relapsed into his usual quiet habits; but as Fred spent the greater part of his time at the Priory, often dining there, the loss of his children's society, and the solitary fireside in the evening, began to produce the effects which might have been expected upon one whose chief happiness depended on domestic ties and cheerful faces around his table. Fred, noticing his uncle's low spirits, induced him to ride over occasionally to the Priory, where his usual cheerfulness returned, and it was about three weeks after his children's marriage, that when walking with Mrs. Gordon through her grounds, he surprised that lady by suddenly saying, "My dear Mrs. Gordon, it is no use my attempting to conceal the matter any longer, but the fact is, that I have become so melancholy and feel so lonely in that large house since Will and Con have left me, that I must either come and live at the Priory, or you must come, in pity to my forlorn situation, and live at Bampton."

Mrs. Gordon, scarcely knowing whether the Earl was serious, or only in one of his joking humours, attempted to rally him for giving way

to despondency on account of his children's short absence—but in vain. He assured her that his proposition had been well considered, and that although now past the age for romantic passion, he had long entertained towards her the deepest regard and affection. "In short, my dear madam," he added, "your interest in my children is almost as deep as my own, and in return they regard you as their mother. What a joyful surprise it would be to them all, to find their hopes realised on their return home."

"My dear friend," replied Mrs. Gordon, "your proposition has come so unexpectedly upon me, that I must have time for reflection before I can give you a decisive answer; but, believe me, I am not insensible to your many excellent qualities of heart and disposition."

Fred Beauchamp and the gay widow approaching, put a stop to the further efforts of the Earl in pressing his suit, and he had only time to entreat she would write him a favourable reply in a day or two, as his future happiness was now dependent on her consent.

Mrs. Gordon, uninfluenced by worldly considerations or ambitious views, felt sorely perplexed

by the Earl's proposal. She was perfectly satisfied with her own position, and the thoughts of leaving her happy home, with every comfort and all her pets around her, produced such painful sensations, that she had nearly resolved on writing a refusal, although couched in the most friendly language, with cogent reasons for declining the honour he intended conferring upon her; when Lady Malcolm, observing her sister's unusual abstraction of thought and nervous manner, at last drew the secret from her, and the confession of the distressing situation in which she felt placed by being compelled to give pain to one she so highly respected, with the dread of that coolness which would naturally arise to destroy the harmony which had hitherto existed between the two families.

"My dear Margaret," continued Lady Malcolm, "you have not advanced one single reasonable excuse for your purposed rejection of the dear old Earl, to whom, I am convinced, you are much more deeply attached than you like to confess to me; in fact, I have long observed, since his visit to me in London, your evident partiality for each other. There is no necessity for

giving up the Priory or your pets; but even if such a sacrifice were required, I should not hesitate in resigning all, rather than give up your oldest and dearest friend. Indeed, my dear sister, I am only surprised you could have hesitated for one moment to accept the Earl's offer, independently of the great pleasure it will afford those dear girls, Blanche and Constance, as well as myself. There will be times, of course, when Charles and William must be absent from this part of the country, leaving the Earl and yourself two solitary beings, in two old solitary houses; so, my dear sister, putting feeling out of the question, the most prudent step you can possibly adopt is to marry the Earl, and you will then be a mutual comfort to each other in your declining years. Moreover, I know Charles would be only too glad to live at the Priory during five or six months of the year, if you will allow him, and you can depend on Constance keeping everything precisely in the same order as at present."

Mrs. Gordon, thinking her sister had spoken very sensibly on this subject, without alluding to rank or worldly advantages, thanked her for her good advice, which she agreed to follow, and a

neatly-written little note was, in accordance therewith, dispatched the next day to Bampton, which brought the Earl to the Priory within an hour of its delivery, in high spirits. To those interested in love scenes between the youthful and ardent, the meeting of these two old friends, on this important matter, might appear too tame and sedate to be rehearsed; we will, therefore, pass it over *sub silentio*, and merely relate the result, that in a fortnight from that day, the Earl and Mrs. Gordon underwent the ceremony of being joined together in holy matrimony at the altar in Bampton Church, none save Lady Malcolm, Mrs. Fortescue, Fred Beauchamp, and Conyers being present, and returned afterwards to Bampton House as if nothing extraordinary had happened, where aunt Gordon assumed her new dignity of Countess of Annandale, without in any way changing her habitual cheerfulness and suavity of temper. There was not one of the old domestics in the Earl's establishment (old servants being generally extremely captious and impassive of innovations in their departments) who did not receive with unfeigned pleasure their new mistress, whose kindness of heart and generous disposition were so well known to

all her inferiors. Lady Malcolm and Mrs. Fortescue returned the same day to London for a short time, promising to be at Bampton again the second week in September.

The news of the Earl's marriage with Mrs. Gordon caused very little surprise in the neighbourhood; the general opinion being the reverse of that so often pronounced on elderly persons "making fools of themselves." Here it was admitted to be "the wisest thing they could have done," by all save our not over-esteemed friend, Mrs. Harcourt, who was of course prepared with an ill-natured speech for the occasion, envenomed, no doubt, by the consideration of her quondam opponent taking precedence of her in all their country parties.

"Only think," she observed to her husband, "of Mrs. Gordon imposing upon that silly old man, and playing her cards so cleverly as to become a Countess? What extraordinary tact some widows have in match-making for themselves as well as others."

"Well, my dear, I do not blame her for making so good a bargain, although I have long suspected this event would take place sooner

or later ; and, in my opinion, the Earl has made a most judicious selection."

" Oh yes, of course," retorted the Lady, " the Bampton Squire can do no wrong since his elevation to the peerage."

Mrs. Gordon had immediately, on accepting the Earl, written to apprize Blanche of her contemplated change of name, and on reading her aunt's letter, she exclaimed " Oh, William ! what do you think has occurred during our short absence from home ?"

" Something, my darling girl, of a joyous nature, I can gather from your sparkling eyes ; perhaps Bob is married ?"

" No, not yet."

" The widow has accepted Fred ?"

" No, dear William, guess again."

" Then the governor has popped the question to aunty ?"

" Oh, William," she said, demurely, " how could you fancy such a thing ?"

" Because, my love, I have fancied it for some five or six months past, and was quite convinced it must soon happen."

" You were a true prophet, Master Will. Dear aunty will soon be in name what she has

ever been in love and affection to us both—a mother."

"My own dear girl," said Beauchamp, catching her in his arms, "this is indeed delightful intelligence, for I often think with pain how melancholy my dear father must feel without his children, and we cannot now be always with him."

"And why can we not, dear William?"

"Because, my love, he thinks we ought to spend a certain portion of the year at the Castle, and he is too wedded to Bampton ever to leave it."

"Indeed," she said, "this is a very delightful place, but I confess my feelings, like his, are influenced by earlier and dearer associations; Bampton and Beauchamp are both hallowed names to me."

"Ah! you naughty child, since you have become Lady Beauchamp; but now, Blanche, seriously, we must proceed on our journey, to visit your Scotch dominions, where I intend committing havoc amongst the grouse, and send a supply to our friends in England, that is, supposing you will allow me to be absent a few hours occasionally from your presence?"

"Well, I suppose, for such a purpose, I may dispense with your attendance sometimes—so now to answer aunty's letter, and I am then at your commands, to set out *en route* for my fatherland."

By the first of September, Malcolm and Constance had engaged to spend a week with Beauchamp and his bride at Annandale Castle, (before returning to Bampton), which they reached the thirty-first of August, in time for the first day of partridge shooting, and as usual, Malcolm began joking Blanche after dinner.

"Well, my love, how many quarrels have you had with Beauchamp since this day month?"

"None at all, Charles, nor likely to have any, I hope."

"'Pon honour, Blanche—eh?"

"Quite true, Charles."

"Oh! I see—Beauchamp gave in at once, poor fellow! anything for a quiet life—always was that sort of man—couldn't stand that little temper of yours, my dear, so knocked under without striking a blow—henpecked husband, and all that sort of thing."

"And pray, Charles, how did you fare with Constance?"

"All one way, my love—turned the bonnet-box out of window at starting—fought like cat and dog for a week, till she saw I *would* keep the upper hand, and now we go on swimmingly together, like the two old swans on the lake yonder. She knows who's master now—don't you, Con?" appealing to his wife.

"Yes, Charles," she replied, laughing, "I rather think I do," with a significant smile at her sister-in-law.

"Well," remarked Malcolm, "this boxing up of two individuals in a travelling carriage, for I know not how long, is all very well once in a man's life, and one degree better than solitary confinement in a prison—but, by Jove! Beauchamp, *tête-à-tête* breakfasts, with ditto dinners, don't suit my humour at all; so now I intend letting loose to night—try every wine in the cellar, and finish off with a bottle of port per head. It's no use, my dears, sending to announce coffee, so go to your rooms when you please. We intend to have a jolly evening, and stagger up stairs about one o'clock in the morning."

"You will do nothing of the kind, Charley dear," replied Blanche, "at least I am sure William will not."

"But he will, my love, and I'll back him up to assert his rights and supremacy, in defiance of petticoat government. Oh! la! how funny! my Lord Beauchamp carried up-stairs roaring drunk, and my Lady Beauchamp in hysterics."

"My dear Charles—how silly you still are!"

"Yes, my love—and always hope to be; so now pass the bottle, and I'll give a toast—bumpers round—may we never feel less happy than now."

CHAPTER XXI.

Whilst Beauchamp and Malcolm were walking over stubbles and turnips in search of partridges, Blanche and Constance were walking through the village, renewing their acquaintance with their poor neighbours; and many a silent blessing was invoked by the aged and infirm, the fatherless and widow, on the heads of those two sisters of charity, as they entered their humble cottages.

Blanche and Beauchamp had resolved on devoting a large portion of their income to ameliorate the condition of the dependants on their extensive properties; and in place of the wretched hovels and small tenements, the gene-

ral habitations of the poor, new cottages were to be erected, on a plan drawn by themselves, which allowed of two good-sized front-rooms on the ground floor, with bakehouse, back-kitchen, &c., and a quarter of an acre of land to each cottage. New school-rooms, where wanted, were also to be provided—clothing clubs established in every village and hamlet on their estates, with a large subscription by themselves, and in addition to Lord Beauchamp's name standing at the head of each club or benefit society, weekly provision was made by himself and Blanche for all widows, orphans, and those past labouring for their own support; so that of each it might be said in the words of Job, "When the ear heard me, then it blessed me, and when the eye saw me, it gave witness to me; because I delivered the poor that cried, and the fatherless, and him that had none to help him."

The management of the whole property in the north, around and belonging to the castle, was entrusted by the earl to his son, who would admit of no intervention between the tenants and himself, in the shape of a lawyer agent; in place of whom the best practical farmer in each

district was appointed by him as an arbitrator in any trivial cases of dispute, and deputed to send him statements of any improvements required, in buildings or drainages on the farms; but when staying at the castle, applications were to be made to Lord Beauchamp, personally, on all matters of this kind, by the tenants themselves; thus the friendly relations, which ought ever to exist between the owner and cultivators of the soil, was established to the mutual benefit of both.

However high in rank any landlord may be, whether duke, marquis, or earl, he may rest assured that it is most unquestionably his interest, if not his duty, to hold the supreme authority over his property in his own hands, and not subject his tenants to be domineered over, and his lands deteriorated, by the pretended supervision of a lawyer-agent, totally ignorant of all agricultural business, and who is paid a handsome per centage for merely collecting the rents, writing a few letters, or occasionally copying out some lease or agreement, framed by men of greater experience than himself. No man can be safely employed as land agent, who is not

thoroughly and practically acquainted with the management and cultivation of land.

After spending a fortnight at Annandale Castle, the two thoroughly happy couples set out on their return to Bampton, where they were received with open arms and warm embraces by the earl and his countess. After these greetings had passed, Malcolm's habitual love of fun broke forth.

"Well, I fear I shall now become like the donkey who had two mammas."

"In what respect, Charles?" asked Blanche.

"Why, he became a very great donkey indeed, my love."

"Oh, that you have ever been, Charles, since I have had the honour of your acquaintance."

"I tell you what it is, aunt, or mamma—which ever you choose to be called—that spoilt pet of yours has become so exceedingly gumptious since her promotion as Lady Beauchamp, that she rules the whole roost—will have her own way in everything; and as for her husband, poor fellow—oh! me—as Mrs. Winter says—she treats him like a dog; in short, it is a most fortunate thing for him to get her back

to Bampton, where I hope you will now keep her in proper order once more."

"Very well, Charles," replied his aunt, "then I will take her to her room, and begin my first lecture."

It were almost superfluous to relate the joy of the Countess on hearing from her own lips the confession of Blanche's happiness in her union with Beauchamp.

"Then I have not over-rated him, my own dearest child?"

"Oh, no, dear aunt—he is so kind, so affectionate, so anxious about me, that I love him, if possible, more every day."

"Thank Heaven for this blessing, my darling girl," exclaimed her aunt, pressing Blanche to her heart.

"Indeed, I do," she replied, "every hour in the day."

"And, Constance, my love," turning to her, "I read in your happy smiles that Charles also makes you a good husband."

"Yes, dear aunt, he is everything I could desire."

The family-party at the dinner-table that evening was the most joyous that can be imagined,

all being in the highest spirits from their happy re-union, but Malcolm's mirth, as usual, was most boisterous. The next day, Bob Conyers and Selina rode over to congratulate their friends on returning to Bampton, and the latter, remarking on Blanche's improved looks and vivacity of spirits, said, "Why, my dear girl, I was beginning to think matrimony a very lugubrious affair, and have put off that little ceremony with Bob as long as possible; but, really, my dear, whether from change of air or change of name, Lady Beauchamp beats Blanche Douglas hollow, with those sparkling eyes and blooming cheeks, which I never saw so brilliant before."

"Oh, Selina, I know what flattery from you means—but, as long as William is satisfied with my looks, I do not regard the opinions of others."

"Indeed, my dearest Blanche, I am perfectly serious and sincere; for I never saw a girl so improved as you are since your marriage."

"Then, my dear Selina," said Bob, "the sooner you follow her example the better—so let us name this day fortnight, and I am sure all our friends here, old and young, will come over

to see the last of the old bachelor, Bob Conyers."

All joyfully accepting this invitation, Selina added, "You must ask mamma *this* question, Bob—the *first*, I answered for myself."

This point having been referred, accordingly, to Lady Markham, she raised no objection; being, like some other mammas, of opinion that the marriage of their eldest daughter opens the path of the other junior sisters to the Hymeneal altar. Sir Lionel gave a grand breakfast on the occasion, which was attended by nearly all the neighbouring families, including a large party from Bampton, now augmented by the arrival of Lady Malcolm and Mrs. Fortescue. Mr. and Mrs. Harcourt were invited also; and, although with a bad grace, they deemed it a good opportunity for renewing that intimacy with their neighbours, which the revelations made at the late trial had somewhat discomposed.

Having left their cards at Bampton since their ward's return, the meeting between aunt and aunt was less *cat-like* than heretofore; and that between aunt and niece, apparently, rather affectionate. Mr. Harcourt, perhaps more sinned against than sinning in the Marston Castle plot,

and devoid of the acrimonious feeling still entertained by his wife against Lord Beauchamp, shook him most cordially by the hand, congratulating him upon Blanche's improved looks and more cheerful manner. In fact, the change in Lady Beauchamp struck every one of her old acquaintance as most extraordinary. But was there not a cause? She had exchanged the harassing anxieties of the last twelve months for peace and security of mind, and, when leaning on her husband's arm, looked the personification of happiness and contentment; and the soft, confiding smile directed to Beauchamp's face said, in plain language, "With him I have found a haven and a rest." Lord Mervyn had, long before the trial, left Marston Castle for Paris, where he was to be joined by his son-in-law, Vernon, and his young wife, to pass the winter. The shock inflicted on Vernon's frame (never very strong) caused great misgivings in his physician's mind as to his entire re-establishment in health ever again; and a warmer climate being recommended, he was to pass the intermediate time in Italy, before joining his father-in-law at Paris.

The marriage ceremony between the Captain

and Miss Honoria was, by the particular desire of Mrs. Winterbottom, solemnized at St. George's Chapel, followed by a long account of the loveliness of the bride and her bridesmaids, &c., the next day, in the *Morning Post;* and a *dejeuner* provided on a large scale from Gunter's, for their London friends and connections, at their own house in Bryanston Square, which had undergone new decorations for the brewer and his wife, who both, after a fair trial, found a country life not at all to their taste, and the reverse of what they expected—the lady complaining of being shut up, during the winter months, like an owl in a barn, without a neighbour dropping in once a month. In short, Mr. Winterbottom had committed an egregious mistake, by purchasing landed property in a locality surrounded by old, stiff-necked families, who would not visit his vulgar wife; and she felt most acutely the change (having no resources in herself) from the gossip and prattle of London to the dull monotony of a country life. At last she told her husband—to use her own expression—"she wouldn't put up, no longer, with the hoity-toity airs of these proud dames." The country house, therefore, was handed over to the

young couple, with the reservation of spending a month there in the summer, and a week or two at Christmas.

The young widow, after another month's deliberation, accepted Fred Beauchamp, with the Grange, who being of a domestic turn and good temper, rather surpassed her expectations from his apparently thoughtless demeanour, which really proceeded from good humour and cheerfulness of disposition.

* * * *

The first of November has again arrived;—again is the breakfast-table at Bampton House thronged with guests in hunting costume. Sir Francis Burnett, Gwynne, with every member of the hunt, are there, in compliment to the Earl and his son, on their opening day, and a greater assemblage of farmers than ever before attended the lawn meet. Sir Francis whispered Beauchamp, "So, my boy, you have changed your opinion about the heiress since this time twelvemonth?"

"No, Sir Francis, of her I have ever entertained one and the same opinion; but I have followed your advice in disregarding that of the world."

"Right, my boy, quite right; the world and his wife have nothing to do with you and your wife."

After breakfast, the Ladies Beauchamp and Malcolm were vaulted into their saddles by their respective lords, to see the hounds thrown into covert, attended by a large party of gentlemen —the Earl taking charge of his daughter-in-law when Beauchamp began drawing for a fox. The horse provided for Blanche was such as a child could ride, of the most gentle and docile disposition, although quite thorough-bred, and a perfect hunter; yet withal, Beauchamp, disliking to see ladies riding over fences, and in dread of any accident occurring to his beloved wife, had exacted a promise from her to return home with the groom as soon as the hounds should leave Park Wood. Selina Conyers, in no wise sobered by marriage, ridiculed Beauchamp for his timidity about Blanche, to as much purpose as heretofore; and Blanche, wishing Selina a good day's sport and a safe return to Bampton, turned her horse's head homewards.

The Park Wood foxes, being proverbially stout, and long travellers, almost invariably afforded capital runs, and although so early in

the season, the one selected on this day had resolved to maintain the reputation of his family, although at the cost of his life, being pulled down in the open after an hour and fifty minutes. With blind ditches and close weather, every horse had quite or more than sufficient work to keep anywhere near the pack with their first fox, without requiring a second; and their riders, being in this case disposed to let well alone, did not express dissent to the order—home.

The dinner party at Bampton in the evening was on a large scale, about thirty sitting down to table; the Countess (late Mrs. Gordon) performing her part in the entertainment with her usual affability, supported by her two pets, Blanche and Constance, who won golden opinions from all their guests by their unaffected manners and cheerful good humour.

After the ladies had retired, Bob Conyers gave the toast usual on such occasions—"Fox-hunting and the Master of the Hounds"—which was received with general applause.

"Gentlemen," said Conyers, rising, after silence had succeeded, "there is one toast more I must be allowed to propose on this most aus-

picious day, which I am quite sure will be received with enthusiasm—The Countess of Annandale, and the Ladies Beauchamp and Malcolm."

"Hurrah!" shouted Gwynne, springing to his legs, "a double bumper to them—they are the right sort, Bob, like the Park Wood foxes, and endeavour to combine the pleasures of 'The Field and the Fireside.'"

"And now," continued Conyers, when the cheers had subsided, "our labours of love having been brought to a happy termination, I will wind up, on behalf of the newly-made Benedicts, in the words of Cotton:—

"'Though fools spurn Hymen's gentle powers,
We, who improve his golden hours,
By sweet experience know
That marriage, rightly understood,
Gives to the tender and the good
A paradise below.'"

THE END.

J. Billing, Printer, 103, Hatton Garden, London, and Guildford, Surrey.

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